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The Symbolist Novel as Secular Scripture: Huysmans, Wilde, and Bely

by

Rita Dirks

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *The Symbolist Novel as Secular Scripture: Huysmans, Wilde, and Bely* submitted by Rita Dirks in partial fulfillment of the requirements form the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in Comparative Literature.

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Abstract

This dissertation—*The Symbolist Novel as Secular Scripture: Huysmans, Wilde, and Bely*—argues that the Symbolist novel emerged when it incorporated the *fin-de-siècle* decadent, pessimistic, mythical, and occult philosophies of the nineteenth century. Such conjoining of intellectual and cultural movements constitutes not so much a rebellion against the then dominant mode of psychological realism as it represents a highly idiosyncratic inflection of the novel's protean nature. Put another way, the Symbolist novel serves a crucial role in literary history because the ways in which it stretched the generical limits of the novel helped to make the novel the very elastic form that it is today.

Three novels are examined closely in the dissertation: Joris-Karl Huysmans' A Rebours (1884), Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891), and Andrei Bely's Petersburg (1916). These works are both representative and culturally distinctive novels, so they serve well this dissertation's goal of showing the cultural conditions that were necessary to generate the Symbolist novel. Moreover, these three novels portray the ways in which the *fin-de-siècle* Symbolist novel shifts its centre of gravity from an aesthetics of spirituality to a spirituality of aesthetics. This movement informs and motivates the study's understanding of the Symbolist novel as a secular scripture.

After a chapter that situates the Symbolist novel in

its historical and cultural milieu, the study's argument unfolds by showing how each novel vitally contributes to the Symbolist's occult quest for truth. In each case, the books examined depict this quest through Symbolist figures and concepts. Huysmans portrays the martyr for truth in his character Des Esseintes; Bely's protagonists—Apollon Apollonvich, and Nikolai Apollonvich, and Alexandr Dudkin—in Petersburg, combine to show an anthroposophic figure, the astral body; Wilde blends realism with an occult supernaturalism by using chiasmus to break down the distinctions between the picture of Dorian Gray and the person of Dorian Gray.

Because scholarly work to date focuses almost exclusively on the poetry of the Symbolist Movement this study contributes to the overall understanding of the Symbolist movement and especially to the importance of such writing in its novel form. Moreover, because there is a dearth of work on the role of the occult and philosophy as determining and influencing factors that gave rise to the Symbolist Novel the study opens for future examination an unremarked area of scholarship.

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INTRODUCTION

> Much of the Symbolist novel—unreadable to us today—is comparable to an Elizabethan dumb show put on before the great play.
> (Karl D. Uitti)

Karl D. Uitti's words from The Concept of Self in the Symbolist Novel (1961) uncannily place on view two of the greatest obstacles facing a reader of the Symbolist novel. First, like the Elizabethan dumb show, its convention, code, milieu, and context stand at a historical distance that serves to occlude the text's meaning: it appears "unreadable to us today." Second, Uitti suggestively makes the paradox of the dumb show apply to the Symbolist novel, for, even without a transparent language, this genre speaks a profoundly evocative, allusive, and even unsettling dialect that only adumbrates and probes the unknown and the unseen. Yet, even when its reader only guesses at meaning, there exists a certain delicious pleasure of entering the realm of the Symbolist novel where every tiny gesture and tic becomes suggestively entwined in a larger significance. To overstate the opacity of the Symbolist novel, however, is to affect a rather ingenuous stance that despairs of making a critical study of the historical and intellectual occasion of the

genre, that is, of remarking the development and importance of this literary form. The present study undertakes one aspect of this very work by examining the prose mode of representative Symbolist writers.

The present dissertation is not a literary history of the Symbolist movement, for a plenitude of such studies exist.[1] Expressed in a telegraphic remark, one which subsequent chapters will unfold in detail, my task at hand is to show that the Symbolist novel emerged when it incorporated the decadent, mythical, spiritual, and occult philosophies of its time, while it simultaneously rebelled against the orthodox codes of the Realist and Naturalist writing. The obscure Symbolist novel, in turn, gave birth to the more critically noticed Modernist novel, or the "great play," to extend Uitti's metaphor.

To contain its scope the present study focuses predominantly on three novels, Joris-Karl Huysmans's A Rebours/Against Nature (1884), Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891), and Andrei Bely's Petersburg (1913-16; 1922). These three novels have become the bible or "breviary

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[1] Most such works highlight only the history of Symbolist poetry. See, for example, such excellent histories of the movement as Anna Balakian's The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal (1967), Charles Chadwick's Symbolism (1971), Joseph Chiari's Symbolism from Poe to Mallarmé (1970), Kenneth Cornell's The Symbolist Movement (1970), and Avril Pyman's A History of Russian Symbolism (1994), to list a few.

of the Decadence"[2] or Symbolism in France, England, and Russia respectively. French Decadence and Symbolism, and European Aestheticism of the *fin de siècle* in general, exerted a determining influence over the first (also referred to as Decadence) and second generation of Symbolists in Russia. The second generation of Symbolists in Russia replaced European Decadence with their own brand of occult Symbolism, which was raised to the status of a *Religionskunst*.

My method highlights the reader's role as a receiver of esoteric or secret knowledge. This method goes forward by noticing that the Symbolist writers wrote to those who would know or understand; for the average reader, the Symbolist writer demonstrated a degree of contempt, or at best, a disregard. This disregard is a paradoxical one because it advances by means of the author portraying a very private, subjective experience. In other words, the address to the reader assumes a certain intimacy because the communication is from one knowing individual to another. But because that disclosure is a complex and recondite one that mobilizes a constellation of discourses or genres—the prophetic, the jeremiad, the Menippean satire, the inspired romantic, to name several of the obvious ones—the Symbolist novel has been met with a strange critical silence. On one hand, it is

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[2] Arthur Symons, quoted in Robert Baldick, Introduction to Joris-Karl Huysmans Against Nature, p. 13.

possible to conjecture that this silence is a necessary thing, for the reader who understands the Symbolist message would, perforce, be breaking the implicit pact that exists between individuals who share secret knowledge; on the other hand, this silence might also be called a sullenness occasioned by bad manners, for the Symbolist explains nothing to those who will not or do not stand on the same intellectual and artistic plane. The Symbolist offers a glimpse into his own vision, without worrying about making sense to anyone else. The Symbolists "wrote largely for themselves, ignoring what they considered a monumentally stupid and frivolous reading public" (Houston 3). Thus, the formation of a literature for the elite or for the initiated ensued, and a predictable bifurcation in reader response characterizes the genre. Because these novels are purposely obscure and difficult to understand, they have remained a frustration to critics, and frustrated commentators frequently denounce Symbolist works as impenetrable rubbish.[3] For those in "the know" the Symbolist novel is not

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[3] For example, here is Osip Mandelshtam's (an Acmeist poet's) reaction upon reading Bely: "Andrei Bely . . . is an unhealthy and negative phenomenon in the life of the Russian language simply because he unsparingly and unceremoniously hounds the word, forcing it to conform to the temperament of his own speculative thought. Choking in his refined prolixity, he cannot sacrifice even one nuance, nor tolerate the slightest break in his capricious thought, and he blows up bridges which he is too lazy to cross. Consequently, after a momentary display of fireworks, he leaves but a pile of broken stones, a dismal picture of destruction, instead of the abundance of life, a sense of organic wholeness, and an active equilibrium. The fundamental sin of writers like

so much a puzzle as it is something that is must be intuited and not subjected to the levers and gears—to the mechanics—of conventional literary criticism.

Consequently, a successful strategy for reading this form seemingly lies with the reader-response school; in the words of the Russian Symbolist theoretician, Vyacheslav Ivanov,

> abstract theory and formal poetics examine an artistic work for itself; in this regard they have no knowledge of Symbolism. About Symbolism one can speak only by studying the work in its relationship to the perceiving subject. (154)

Ivanov intensifies this equation by indicating the dependence of the movement on a knowing audience when he says, "we Symbolists do not exist if there are no Symbolist-listeners. For Symbolism is not merely the creative act alone, but the creative reciprocal action" (156). The word *symbol* itself, of course, "connotes a sign which needs to be deciphered and therefore invites the participation of a reader" (Peterson, A History xi).

The communication, when it is successful, then, between the author and reader is a different one here than that in the traditional novel. In the Symbolist novel, readers are "forced to take an active part in the composition of the

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Andrei Bely is disrespect for the Hellenic nature of the word, and unsparing exploitation of the word for personal intuitive ends" (qtd. in Harris 121).

novel's meaning" (Iser, The Implied Reader xii). While novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tried to make the job of the readers reasonably easy (there are so many appeals to the reader to understand!), the Symbolist, taking his or her cue from Charles Baudelaire, addresses the reader as a "hypocryte lecteur" (Les Fleurs du mal). Symbolist novels are not reader-friendly; the formerly amicable narrator-narratee relations are gone, and so is the predictability of the text or the wish-fulfilment of the typical reader.

The Symbolist novel pitches itself at a very different reader than do other forms of novelistic address. Instead of the "implied reader" the Symbolists would have an "initiated reader." Roland Barthes' categories of readable and unreadable texts, as outlined in S/Z, serve me well to distinguish between the Symbolist novel and other forms. Barthes considers those texts which are traditionally intelligible as *lisible*, or *texte de plaisir*, and those which cannot be popularly read, *scriptible*, or *texte de jouissance* (3-4). Thus, a novel such as Flaubert's Madame Bovary or Tolstoy's Anna Karenina would be considered *lisible*, and Joyce's Ulysses or Bely's Symphony IV would be considered *scriptible*.[4] Although little is gained in asserting that the Symbolist novel initiated the *scriptible*

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[4] I am grateful to professor Edward Mozejko for this suggestion.

novel, it is worth contending that this theoretical construct is epitomized by it.

A structuralist methodology (the Geneva School, for example), it is worth noting, fails to engage with the Symbolist novel because this approach looks at a text as an independent linguistic phenomenon. In Andrew Gibsons's words,

> They [the methods of structuralist narratology] have seldom looked as though they might be helpful to anyone dealing with the less orthodox forms of narrative. These forms of narrative are most effectively approached, not in terms of their conformity to critical notions of narrative coherence, but as they refuse to abide by such notions. In other words, much of what such narratives have to say lies precisely in their resistance to being encapsulated in the kind of fixed terms employed by either a Bremond or a Booth. (5)

This methodology does not take the author's intention towards the reader into account, nor the reader's consciousness. It does not emphasize these particular philosophical or ideological issues, yet so much of the Symbolist novel is a way of life—life lived as art. The form may even be regarded as a homily on the unorthodox life.

Where homily evokes the pulpit, however, the Symbolist novel eschews a simple or conventional address to its audience by substituting esoteric knowledge in place of blunt exhortation. To return to Uitti's simile, the dumb show enacted by the Symbolist novel has as its key player the occult. For this term to serve my means effectively, it is necessary to unfold some its polysemy. Occult, then, must refer to its Latinate root in the sense of *occulere*—to cover over, to hide or conceal.

The paradox of the Symbolist novel lies with this sense, indeed is encapsulated in it, for in the very act of communicating it cloaks itself. This effect is wrought by the poetics espoused by the Symbolists and by their own personal commitments to occult philosophies. Rather than the paradox of communication and concealment producing a zero sum, however, occult carries also a sense that communication occurs only to the initiated. In this sense, the Oxford English Dictionary amplifies again on occult when it notes that the occult is not "apprehended, or not apprehensible, by the mind;" rather, the occult is "beyond the range of understanding or of ordinary knowledge."

An example of the Symbolist habit for passing on secret knowledge or sacred knowledge for the select few who would "get it" can be seen in a number of key texts. While Huysmans' A Rebours is a guide to the Decadent lifestyle, Wilde's protagonists live by that "yellow book's"

instruction, but not revealing, only hinting, at the dandy's secret life. Bely himself primarily drew on a Germanic blend of philosophical and occult traditions—namely, the anthroposophic teachings of Rudolf Steiner. The undeniable influence of Anthroposophy is evident in the creative writings of this Russian Symbolist in particular. W.B. Yeats and James Joyce, just to name two others whom one may consider to be Symbolists, share Bely's lifelong preoccupation with the hermetic tradition. Anthroposophy is also the occult belief of choice of many intellectuals such as Vasiliy Kandinsky, Asya Turgeneva, Saul Bellow, Jens Bjørneboe, and Marina Tsvetaeva, to mention just a few.[5]

My readings of Bely's work will place on view the core of my thesis: the Symbolist novel is engendered by philosophical and occult beliefs which fostered the then new way of writing a novel—the Symbolist novel. These beliefs are the key to understanding the accursedly difficult Symbolist novel and the Symbolists' language. The Symbolists' language, unlike that of the Naturalists, or

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[5] See, for example, John E. Bowlt and Rose-Carol Washton Long, eds., The Life of Vasilii Kandinsky in Russian Art: A Study of *On the Spiritual in Art*. Newtonville: Oriental Research Partners, 1980; Assja Turgenieff, Erinnerungen an Rudolf Steiner und die Arbeit am Ersten Goetheanum. Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1972; Fredrica K. Bartz, "The Role of Rudolf Steiner in the Dreams in Humboldt's Gift," Ball State University Forum 24:1 (Winter 1983): 27-29; William Mishler, "Jens Bjørneboe, Anthroposophy and Hertug Hans, Edda 2 (1987):167-178; and Tat'yana Kuznetsova, Tsvetaeva i Shteyner: Poet v svete antroposofii. Moscow: Pristsel's, 1996, respectively.

Realists, or Acmeists is not meant to "copy" the world; its purpose is to create another world based on a philosophical or occult position. The hermetic Symbolist style is a direct outgrowth of the inner spiritual belief and practice.

The role of the occult in understanding a Symbolist novel is pivotal: without this role defined, it is possible to overlook foundational aspects of the genre. In his otherwise fine essay, "The Veil of Isis as a Paradigm of Russian Symbolist Mythopoesis," Michael Wachtel fails to trace the Symbolists' connection to Mme Blavatsky (the founder of Theosophy, of which Anthroposophy is an offshoot) and her influential work, Isis Unveiled (1877). Theosophy was critical in informing the world view and writings of many a Symbolist. Where Wachtel overlooks this important aspect and only discusses the relationship between Symbolist writings and the Egyptian goddess, he pulls up just short of placing on view not only the intellectual and philosophical background to the genre but also the richer text that appears when the nexus of occult belief is unravelled.

A brief aside is worth raising at this point. The task of the current study also promises to provide the key to understanding other hitherto difficult novels. For example, Heath Moon, in his article, "Is The Sacred Fount a Symbolist Novel?", begins with the supposition that this particular novel by Henry James could finally be understood "if we could discover its place in the context of literary history"

(306). The Sacred Fount, written in the 1890s, is different from James's other published work. Moon contends that it is a Symbolist novel, and that placing this novel within the proper genre will yield the key to its interpretation.

My approach to the texts that I have chosen is also necessarily comparative; that is, I study the Symbolist novel in three different languages and cultures. This study is divided into five chapters. After situating the Symbolist novel in Chapter 1, in each of the following chapters on Huysmans, Wilde, and Bely (Chapters 2, 3, and 4, respectively) I will show the role of the occult, Schopenhauer's and other current philosophies in the way they influenced the novel at hand, leading the novelist to write his own secular scripture to a new kind of reader. In the concluding chapter I provide a nonessentialist definition of the Symbolist novel, based on the criteria developed in the previous chapters.

By way of closing out this introduction, I want to reinforce for emphasis my governing intention in undertaking this work: the Symbolist novel as a distinct and definable type. It is too grand a gesture to extend Uitti's metaphor even further—to suggest that this study will allow the "dumb show" an audible voice. Yet, by tracing into Modernism the ongoing presence of Symbolist writing the present study indicates that this important literary tradition is an undervalued one that is all too often only treated as the

precursor to the principal literary movement of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 1

SITUATING THE SYMBOLIST NOVEL

> The interlude, half a mock-interlude, of Decadence, diverted the attention of the critics while something more serious was in preparation. That something more serious has crystallised, for the time, under the form of Symbolism, in which art returns to the only pathway, leading through beautiful things to the eternal beauty. (Arthur Symons, The Symbolist Movement)

> The symbolist is a theurgist from the outset, a possessor of secret knowledge.
>
> (Aleksandr Blok)

> He [Jesus] told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you [the Twelve and a few others close to him]. But to those on the outside everything is in parables so that, "`they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; . . .'"
>
> (Mark 4:11-12a, NIV)

> The plain reader be damned. (Stuart Gilbert, Eugene Jolas, and Elliot Paul)

Critical literature on the Symbolist movement is almost exclusively associated with verse, in particular with the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, and Stéphane Mallarmé who undertook to change and changed

the face of poetry forever. The Symbolist movement, however, is too broad to confine to just one genre. There are various manifestations of it, as seen, for example, in Symbolist theatre (Maurice Maeterlinck), Symbolist painting (Gustave Moreau, Odilon Redon, Mikhail Vrubel, the Pre-Raphaelites), and Symbolist music (Claude Debussy, Alexandr Scriabin). This variety notwithstanding, literary critical interest, judging by the sheer quality of volumes published, remains centred on poetry.[6]

Still, notable exceptions to this general rule, that is, works on the Symbolist novel, exist. Arthur Symons, in his seminal The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899), introduces to his English audience the following prose writers: Joris-Karl Huysmans, Viliers de l'Isle-Adam, and Gérard de Nerval. Uitti, as mentioned in the Introduction, is one of the first critics in the twentieth century to provide a comprehensive, albeit brief (sixty-six pages), study on the Symbolist novel. Also, two short essays, one by Melvin Friedman, "The Symbolist Novel: Huysmans to Malraux" (1976) and another one by R.J. Keys, "Symbolism and the

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[6] In addition to the ones mentioned in the Introduction, the history and theory of Symbolist poetry has been documented sumptuously in the following volumes (this is a relatively short list): Anna Balakian, The Symbolist Movement: A critical Appraisal (1967), C.M. Bowra, The Heritage of Symbolism (1947), Georgette Donchin, The Influence of French Symbolism on Russian Poetry (1958), Lothar Hönnighausen, The Symbolist Tradition in English Literature (1988), A.G. Lehrmann, The Symbolist Aesthetic in France (1968), and Anca Vlasopolos, The Symbolic Method of Coleridge, Baudelaire, and Yeats (1983).

Novel" (1983), are pivotal advances in the study of Symbolist prose. The most significant progress to date has been made in the study of the Russian Symbolist novel, notably Vladimir Alexandrov's Andrei Bely: The Major Symbolist Fiction (1985) and, more recently, Roger Keys' The Reluctant Modernist: Andrei Belyi and the Development of Russian Fiction, 1902-1914 (1996).

Overall, however, works focussed exclusively on Symbolist novels are meagre. Chadwick, in his Symbolism, states laconically towards the end of his study, that "the concept of a Symbolist novel is not one which has ever made any great headway among literary historians" (54). At best, and still predominantly, some literary critics admit to the Symbolist movement furnishing literature as we know it with new forms in *all* genres:

> Durch sie [die literarische Bewegung des Symbolismus] erhielt die Lyrik, die im Mittelpunkt der Theorie und Praxis stand, neue Maßstäbe und Impulse. Von ihrem Zentrum der erneuerten Lyrik aus erfaßte die Bewegung die anderen literarischen Gattungen und wurde für deren Entwicklung von entscheidenender Bedeutung. (Hoffmann 11)

In her The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal, Anna Balakian makes the pronouncement that "the symbolist novel is a contradiction in terms, since the symbolist coterie abhorred the novel as it rejected all narrative forms . . .

When we speak of symbolism, . . our basic substance is poetry" (159). She, however, overlooks the fact that the Symbolists rejected Realist and Naturalist novels vehemently, but welcomed innovations in the novel, as they did in poetry or any other art form. Fifteen years later, Balakian does include several essays on the Symbolist novel in her edited volume, The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages (1982). Although she is but the editor of the later volume, the very existence of essays on Symbolist prose suggests that it is no longer so neglected a form.

That Symbolist prose, more specifically the Symbolist novel, is so frequently overlooked as a form is surprising, for the Symbolists themselves showed their self-conscious effort toward their overall project of rejecting and recreating, irrespective of the genre involved. For example, Jean Moréas wrote about the evolution of prose fiction in his Symbolist Manifesto of 1886: "Prose—novels, short stories, tales, imaginative flights—follows a development analogous with that of poetry. . . . The symbolic novel may take many different forms" (Delevoy 71).[7] It must be remembered that the first generation of (French) Symbolists themselves wrote prose poems; Baudelaire's Petits poèmes en prose (1861) and Rimbaud's Les Illuminations (1872,

---

[7] Jean Moréas (1856-1910): "A Literary Manifesto—Symbolism," published in Le Figaro, Paris, 18 September, 1886.

published in 1886) and Une Saison en enfer (1873) serve as two prominent examples. In fact, when the same Symbolists "declared an end to the notion of *genre tranché*, and opened the door to the cohabitation of prose and poetry in the same work, a new kind of novel came into being" (Friedman, Melvin 453).

Another weakness of existing criticism on Symbolist prose surfaces in disagreements over which novels might be called Symbolist. Melvin Friedman, for one, names the following as Symbolist novels: Edouard Dujardin's Les Lauriers sont coupés (1887), which "offers the texture of Symbolism itself" (454), Marcel Proust's À la recherche du temps perdu (1913-27), "with its Wagner-type `overture' and its musicological analogues," and James Joyce's Ulysses (1914-22), which is "perhaps the most characteristic Symbolist novel" (456). In 1995, a book appeared in Russia, Three Symbolist Novels, which includes translations of Huysmans' A Rebours, Rilke's Die Aufzeichnngen des Malte Laurids Brigge, and Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, with a postscript by V.M. Tolmachev, who attempts to define the genre, but offers a general characterization of the Symbolist movement instead. Carol Andrews has written an article fairly recently on "Faulkner and the Symbolist Novel" (1989). Alexandrov, of course, deems all of Bely's major works as Symbolist novels. Depending on whom one reads, Thomas Carlyle's Sartor Resartus (1838), William

Faulkner's As I Lay Dying (1930), Yasunari Kawabata's Snow Country (1947), Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's L'Eve futur (1885) have been named in the Symbolist novel roster.

But are the above really Symbolist novels? Quite a few of them fall outside of the historical time frame of the Symbolist Movement. What is a Symbolist novel then? How does one decide? Where it might be possible to expect that the current study opens by defining the Symbolist novel, it is much more crucial for now to *situate* the form. This strategy arises from the organizing structure presented in my Introduction: namely, the Symbolist novel is one whose codes and conditions are largely lost to contemporary readers. Also, although Symbolist novels could be written outside of the 1880-1920 time-frame, and Symbolism is arguably more of a state of mind than a literary period,[8] I have chosen the three novels under discussion specifically from the times of the Symbolist movement(s). By situating the form in social, literary and intellectual history, it becomes possible to display the elements that characterize the genre, and, it becomes possible to offer examples of readings in the chapters that follow that uncover the work effected by the Symbolist novel.

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[8] For example, Michael Gibson, in his Symbolism (1995) opens his study thus: "Less an artistic movement than a state of mind, Symbolism appeared towards the middle of the 19th century" (7). However, one can only refer to a certain state of mind once the mind-set has had its beginnings under certain cultural conditions.

It is worth emphasizing here that my task of situating the Symbolist novel is a necessary one to a comparatist, for the historical conditions that generated the form in one culture may not have gained currency until a later period in another country. Put another way, historically, Symbolism is a well-defined movement; it occupies a *fin-de-siécle* position roughly between 1880 and 1920 (1884 to 1895 in France, 1892 to 1912 in Russia, and the 1890s in England). The fact that the movement in each country is short-lived but combined yields a longer period is one of the attractions to the comparative approach, for it effectively prolongs the Symbolist period in total and, to this reader, it means more of a good thing.

A final note on the goal at hand: by situating the novel, it becomes possible to build the foundation of a reading strategy that opens this literary form to a fuller understanding. My goal, then, is pragmatic. In place of debating the form's defining characteristics just now, at the start of this chapter, I offer a focus on its hidden significances.

Partially, the scarcity of theory on the Symbolist novel and even a definition are due to the lack of agreement among literary scholars in naming the period itself. Decadence and Symbolism occupy pretty much the same period in time in France, England, and Russia (with a few additional variations such as Aestheticism, which I will not

address as a movement here). In France and Russia, Decadence was regarded as a "forerunner of Symbolism" (Ivanov-Razumnik, "Ot `dekadenstva'" 319; Kermode, Romantic 109). Avril Pyman echoes Ivanov-Razumnik and Kermode with a more emphatic reference to Decadence as "the cultural malaise which prepared the ground for Symbolism" in Russia (1). In England, despite Symons's momentous The Symbolist Movement, the label did not gain popularity. The late Victorian period is usually referred to as the "*l'art pour l'art* aesthetic eighties, the gay, mauve, yellow, decadent, naughty nineties" (Dowling vii); usually it is not referred to nor followed by something labelled "Symbolism."[9]

Going back to the earliest writings of the distinction between Decadence and Symbolism, I cite Moréas again. In his "Manifesto" he chooses the name "Symbolism" among various others for the literary trend of his day: "a development which hasty judges have inexplicably named decadence. . . . We have already suggested *Symbolism* as the only name really suitable to describe the present trend of the creative spirit in art. That name may be allowed to stand." And further, he names the novel which broke away from the Naturalist one as "the symbolic/impressionist novel" (Delevoy 71).

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[9] At least one exception exists in designating the period as Symbolist—Lothar Hönnighausen in his The Symbolist Tradition in English Literature proclaims the works of the Pre-Raphaelites and later Victorians as such.

Symons considers the term "decadent" as applicable to a style only. In an essay on George Meredith (1897) he writes: "What Decadence, in literature, really means is that learned corruption of language by which style ceases to be organic, and becomes, in the pursuit of some new expressiveness or beauty, deliberately abnormal" ("A Note on George Meredith," Studies in Prose and Verse 149, qtd. in Temple, A Critic's 154-55). Two years later, in his Introduction to The Symbolist Movement, Symons considers Decadence to be a first stage of the greater Symbolist Movement. He was actually planning to write The Decadent Movement in Literature, but what materialized is his ground-breaking study which we have today. The name change here is significant.

In general, Decadence and Symbolism are virtually impossible to define under the auspice of literary movements. Labels and classifications are an anathema to the creative spirit of that age. Both designations were unwelcome labels for the artists; they took their cue from Mallarmé not to name things:

> To *name* an object is largely to destroy poetic enjoyment, which comes from gradual divination. The ideal is to *suggest* the object. . .
>
> The purpose of literature—the *only* purpose—is to *evoke* things.
>
> I detest `schools' . . . and anything resembling schools. The professorial attitude toward

> literature is repugnant to me. Literature is entirely an individual matter. ("Evolution" 689)

For the purposes of this dissertation, I shall proceed under the premise that Decadence and Symbolism are not two distinct and separate movements. Although I do agree with Engstrom and Scott in principle that there are "certain fundamental distinctions between symbolist and decadent" literature, they are not within the scope of this dissertation.[10] Here, I agree with Murray G.H. Pittock's position; I do not distinguish between Decadence and Symbolism. He argues "for a simplification of the use of the literary terms, Decadence, Symbolism, and Aestheticism, often used to define the period without themselves bearing any clear sense of definition" and uses Wilde as an example to illustrate his point: "Wilde on his showy American tour was an Aesthete; Wilde on trial was a Decadent; Wilde as writer was in many respects a Symbolist" (2-3). What is important here is that Wilde the writer is a Symbolist. The Decadents and the Symbolist show general enough agreement, if there can be such a thing among individualists, in matters of art. Above all, they used the same approach:

> That is the seeking for a world beyond their own, found in the past, in mysticism, Neoplatonism, the

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[10] For someone who differentiates between Aestheticism, Decadence, and Symbolism see, for example, Lorraine McMullen's An Introduction to the Aesthetic Movement in English Literature (1971).

> occult, the Church, or in the self, in the heart of darkness of the artist's existential drive to be free from his increasingly scientifically defined environment, or the hunt for beauty which is temporal, and thus is in the end a hunt for death. (Pittock 3)

Uitti begins his study by simply referring to the Symbolist novel "as the novel at its most original in the decade 1885-1895 (or slightly later)" (14). He sees Aestheticism and Decadence as the climate within which the Symbolist novel was born (65). Uitti's point provides a useful distinction, for he effectively names Aestheticism and Decadence as the cultural condition that gave rise to a specific form—the Symbolist novel. It is sufficient, then, to state that the Symbolist novel emerged during Decadence, the latter being a spiritual mood or malaise, attitude or lifestyle at the end of the nineteenth century.

To further my goal to impart the hidden or unseen significances during the time of the Symbolist Movement, I proceed to discuss the philosophies and beliefs prevalent then which helped shape the Symbolist novel. Symbolism was always more than the manifesto of Moréas or declarations of Mallarmé. It had its own world-view that was independent of and contrary to the one of the day; it was unconstrained and, although often religious, not exactly traditionally Christian. The Symbolist movement, it must be underscored,

possesses its own ideological structure. This structure, however, was not a unified or pure one; rather, it was heterodox and hybrid, with its strongest connections stemming from mysticism, religion, philosophy, and reaction to conventional literary modes and readers.[11]

The ideological structure of Symbolism did not originate from any particular manifesto. Rather, it expressed itself in a variety of ways, as was pointed out earlier (for example, music, painting). My concern here, however, is with its textual incarnations as they appeared in France, England, and Russia between 1880-1920.

This forty-year period, in so far as the Symbolist novel is concerned, can be said to consist of a peculiar layer of ideological tensions. First, orthodoxy and organized religion found itself no longer pre-eminent. It became, instead, one of many ways of rendering the world sensible and in its place arose a fascination with the occult and mysticism. In a post-Darwinian society, a wide-spread interest in various forms of mysticism and occultism provided an alternative for individuals who were satisfied with neither scientific or materialistic interpretations of the world, nor those of the official Church as well. Significantly, the Theosophical Society was founded in 1875.

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[11] See, for example, Erlich: "The principal impetus behind the Symbolists' collective venture into the study of poetics is to be sought in the artistic creed, and, ultimately, in the underlying philosophical tenets of the movement which they represented" (33).

Its founder's, Madame Blavatsky's, influential books began to appear shortly afterwards: Isis Unveiled in 1877 and The Secret Doctrine in 1888. Anthroposophy, an offshoot of Theosophy, became a separate movement with Rudolf Steiner at its head in 1913. Theosophy and Anthroposophy found tremendous resonance among intellectuals and artists of all kinds in Europe, as already alluded to in my opening pages. The occult beliefs of Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), especially his doctrine of correspondences—the idea of a direct connection between the world seen and unseen, were revived as well, along with more ancient ones. The Egyptian Hermes Trismegistos' writings circulated in Symbolist and other intellectual circles. Hermes, like Plato before him, preached a world as we know it corresponding to an ideal or divine counterpart.

The late nineteenth century is definitely an era of ardent heightened spiritual awareness and interest in philosophical idealism. The common thread among all occult beliefs is

> a belief that the universe is essentially spiritual, so that to this extent occultism may be described as a form of idealism. Two of the most recurrent notions of the many 'occult philosophies' are essentially Neo-Platonic: they are (a) that the life or energy of God permeates all created things, visible and invisible, and (b)

> that earthly phenomena `correspond' to, i.e. are symbols or counterparts of, spiritual realities. (Gibbons 11)

During this period as well, largely through the writings of Schopenhauer, Neoplatonism gained much currency, particularly because of its power to offset the positivistic philosophies. Since "all of the symbolists were Platonists or Neoplatonists," the interest in Schopenhauer was only more stimulated in France, England, and Russia (Bigelow 34). His teachings not only encouraged certain artists of the day but were elevated to cult proportions in Symbolist circles.

Schopenhauer's leading contribution to Western philosophy is the teaching that the universe is a representation or idea, and not just any, but an individual's representation. It is understandable why this principle would be attractive to the individualist/Symbolist: these are *my* perceptions, *my* ideas, *my* world; if they are not from within me, they do not exist at all. In addition, Schopenhauer's views on art as salvation from the world of rationalism, practicality, and middle-class common sense found great resonance among the Symbolists.

Second, this revival of the occult and mysticism, the ideologies of which underlie the Symbolist novel, distinguishes this novel from those of its immediate predecessor(s). The Symbolist novel consciously broke its

ties with all other types of novels, especially those of the Realist and Naturalist traditions:[12]

> Symbolism . . . went far beyond the realists' description of an external, objective world in portraying not the mundane surface of events but 'the phenomena of the human spirit'. For many this higher reality was synonymous with religion and mysticism; but it was also defined as the subjective element in human experience, the 'inner life' of feeling, dream hallucination and unreason. (Swingewood 3)

Mimesis, the method of Realists, involves writing the truth of this world as it seems meaningful in everyday living; it is the reproduction of reality easily recognized by the

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[12] The relationship, of course, between Naturalism and Symbolism is a complex and shifting one. Naturalism, like Romanticism, depends upon symbolism in its general sense, so to argue that Symbolism as a movement departs entirely from Naturalism is to create a rather false contrast. Where Naturalism can be broadly conceived of as a secularism, and, therefore, as a strong antithesis to the various theisms at work in Romanticism, Symbolism sidesteps these philosophical tensions by moving its centre of gravity to the matter of transforming reality through its use of symbols and language. The transformational activity constellates Symbolisms's magical or occult quality; this metaphysical register is by turns, contradictorily so, both secular and sacred in its world-view. Because, however, it is possible in Symbolism for a writer to be both secular and spiritual in his outlook, my term *secular scripture* attempts to gather together the combinatory and contradictory dynamic that animates the Symbolist agenda of transfiguring the world through art. I am indebted to my conversations and correspondence with Anna Gural-Migdal for helping me in these matters.

average reader. Symbolism records things unseen, what is behind mere appearances of the real world, the representation of the Ideal, Absolute, ineffable.

In a Symbolist novel notions such as plot and "standards of characters" are eroded (Wellek, "What is" 18). In A Rebours, for example, "plot in the traditional sense has disappeared, for nothing happens apart from the steady heightening of Des Esseintes' sensibilities" (Swingewood 62). The Symbolist novel attempted to escape the quotidian middle- and lower-class life so well depicted in the Naturalist novel. Instead, they seek "a peculiar and refined estheticism, in the cult of the extraordinary, of the exceptional" (Vajda 33). If the reader were to get any enjoyment or pleasure from reading a Symbolist novel, notions of story and plot in the traditional sense have to be sacrificed.

The Symbolists deliberately set themselves apart from the logical and rational thought positions popular in the late nineteenth century. In France, and later in England and Russia as well, mystical thinking was in direct contradiction to the positivist theories of Hippolyte Taine and August Comte. The growing materialistic society was leaning towards scientific inquiry, rejecting metaphysics and theology; to them hidden or unseen entities did not exist. For the Symbolists, truth lies in subjectivism and mystical thinking.

Comte as a thinker, who proclaimed the idea that we can best learn through simple observation, found an echo in Emile Zola. "Science alone, they [the positivists] claim, generates reliable knowledge of nature, and in promoting this claim they are closely related to naturalism" (Spiceland, "Positivism" 864). Naturalism, as a literary movement, restricted itself to the use of language as reference, or, in other words, words were used as a function of representing an object or a thought. The Symbolists believed in the magic of the word itself (see, for example, Bely, "The Magic of Words" in his Symbolism). This change in perspective alone would be enough to generate significant remodelling in approaching the act of writing.

Third, a social tension appeared that was not so much democratic as it was idiosyncratic. That is, a discourse began to emerge that prized the eccentric, the genius, and the individual over the masses. One of the most consistent elements of the Symbolist condition is an elitist disdain for the public or plain reader. Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), for one, in his "Barbarians, Philistines, Populace" (Culture and Anarchy) helped shape the idea of a "Philistine reader"[13] in England. To him, the Barbarians, Philistines, and the Populace referred to the aristocratic, middle, and

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[13] See Arnold's note on *Philistines* in his Culture and Anarchy: "Philistine must have originally meant, in the mind of those who invented the nickname, a strong, dogged, unenlightened opponent of the chosen people, of the children of light" (n. to p. 101, 228-29).

working social classes respectively. The Philistines, or the middle class, which Arnold knew so well because, by his own admission, it was his own class (99), especially come under attack in this article, but the other two social classes do not fare much better. The ideal individual or reader, in Arnold's view, is what he calls an *alien* nature, which emerges in all above classes, who "have, in general, a rough time of it in their lives" (108). These aliens or outsiders of their class have "a curiosity about their best self, with a bent for seeing things as they are, for disentangling themselves from machinery" (108). For the Symbolists, the ideal reader, then, is someone who is that alien in the mass culture of the Philistines who "knew not" but read the literature prescribed by the middle class tastes and mores.

A model reader for the Symbolists would be someone who could be sophisticated enough, for starters, to determine the meaning of the text, while, at the same time being aware of several meanings:

> Since the ambiguity of words is profound and emotive words are easily confused with references, the reader must be aware of the doubleness of talk and of the semantic scale along which words slide from meaning to meaning. (Tindall 25)

On the relationship between artist and audience, what music means to Debussy (1862-1918) can be said for the Symbolist novel:

> Really music should be a hermetic science, protected by texts which take so long to interpret and which are so difficult that in this way the crowd of people who take music for granted could be thoroughly put off. Instead of trying to make music more accessible to the public, I propose the setting-up of a `Society of Musical Esoterism'. (qtd. in Delevoy 34)

Art's appeal to the majority is regarded as the severest possible judgement upon an artist; equally, commercial value and success of works produced is disdained as well. Balakian writes that in the 1890s, through their "esoteric view of art and rejection of society, as a result, the Symbolists moved in closed circles communicating solely with their own breed" (Balakian, 1967, 10). This exclusivity led not only to the most original works in the novel, but also to a reaction, often deadly, on the part of the excluded.

The decadent lifestyle (and exclusion from it) irritated the "hypocritical reader"; the plain reader had his vengeance on the hyperindividualists who disdained him. The Philistines fought back by bringing Baudelaire to trial, Wilde to trial and exile (and attempting do the same with the likes of Symons and Beardsley (Pittock 4)), Bely to geographical and internal exile, in other words, death. Huysmans escaped a vengeful death by the mob through a natural death—cancer. The middle class will not be ignored;

because they are the norm, they want everyone to abide by the rules of the norm.

Yet the Symbolists succeeded and still succeed in barring the average reader from their works. Their Neoplatonic beliefs that a text is neither simply a rendering of words and meanings, nor a transcript from nature, but that behind it lies another order of meaning is still unpopular. Their conviction that an ideal world does exist and that it is up to the artist/seer/prophet to seek it, attain it, and make it known is commonly a subject of ridicule. This deliberate narrowing of audience on the part of the Symbolist novelists, by not allowing bourgeois *roman* readers into the exclusive initiated club, can be viewed in terms of another kind of elite.

The Symbolists made art for the enjoyment of the illuminated and "knowing." When Jesus' habit of speaking in parables was questioned, "he described them as stories told to them without—to outsiders—with the express purpose of concealing a mystery that was to be understood only by insiders" (Kermode, Genesis 2). Alexandr Blok, a friend and fellow-Symbolist of Bely, referred to the Russian Symbolists as "the few who know" (146). According to Blok, "A Symbolist can only be born" or at least be "baptized with the `fire and spirit' of symbolism" (152). Symbolist literature abounds in religious language and attitudes.

The Symbolists did not simply provide an antidote to

everyday living; they sought and offered true reality of a higher kind; the ideal reader could touch the Ideal. To some this was God, to other simply a spiritual state of being. They had no great "message" to proclaim in the evangelical sense; a reciprocal aesthetic and spiritual emotion is all that was required.

These are the conditions, then, that gave rise to the Symbolist novel. Moreover, it is my central contention that this multifold dynamic defines the Symbolist novel. That is, the Symbolist novel is one that expresses itself in mystical ways; it represents the world of thought, of ideals, and its social orientation is always to the outsider or aesthetic elitist. The Symbolist novel, then, possessed a certain agenda; it functioned as a kind of secular scripture. To the adherents of Symbolism it became a way of viewing the world and living within it. In as much as I have chosen to compress two seemingly contradictory terms—secular and scripture—it is plain that an interpretive methodology is my goal. That is, I propose a Symbolist hermeneutic, one that finds not contradiction in the apposition of the secular and the divine, but rather an invigorating paradox or tension.

CHAPTER 2

HUYSMANS' *A REBOURS*-THE RELIGION OF DECADENCE

> "I love my art so much that I shall only be happy when I can practice it for myself alone."
> (Gustave Moreau)
>
> "It will be said, I suppose, that I am attempting to flabbergast the mob with a lofty statement. That is true."
> (Stéphane Mallarmé)
>
> "Symbolism in literature . . . is a form of expression . . . for an unseen reality apprehended by the consciousness."
> (Arthur Symons)
>
> "What is truth?" Pilate asked.
> (John 18:38)

Introduction

The Symbolist novel emerged in the decadent hothouse of France during the last half of the nineteenth century, when this new literary form distinguished itself from its poetic counterpart by incorporating, and so establishing itself on, the philosophies and occult beliefs of a certain heterodox elite. Thus, the Symbolist novel is a direct outgrowth of the ideas current in *fin-de-siècle* intellectual and artistic circles, but it arises by fusing the philosophical and

spiritual into an intensely private and parabolic discursive form. Here stands a special ardour for the philosophy of Schopenhauer, often combined with a belief in the existence of a spiritual realm.[14] This rather curious amalgamation of ideas can be explained, in part, by a desire on the artists' behalf to counter the growing materialism of the age, but without a too obvious acceptance of the spiritual conventions of the day. The idea of forging a redemptive role for art during this philistine age (Schopenhauer) by means of articulating some form of a divine design (the occult) thus animates the Symbolist novel. This emergent literary form was possible because the concept of a principle of correspondence between the created world and the absolute world, the individual and deity, and the possibility of human fulfilment through contemplation, meditation, and, chiefly, art, took a powerful turn in the mind of many intellectuals at the turn of the nineteenth century.

However, because two factors—occultism and Schopenhauer's philosophy—stand as the seminal elements in the formation of the Symbolist novel, I will treat them in some detail under separate headings in this chapter. My goal here lies with reading Huysmans' A Rebours as a kind of

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[14] For an insightful overview of the period, see, for example, Richard Taylor, "Die Mystisch-Okkulte Renaissance: Rituelle Magie und Symbolistische Dichtung" in Pfister, 100-14.

spiritual quest that eventuates in a new literary form while it serves its author as a kind of spiritual autobiography. In this sense the author's life and his art become one in the Symbolist novel. It is crucial to reiterate that this novelistic form becomes only a *kind* of spiritual autobiography. That is, the highly private spiritual quest gestures toward autobiography, particularly where coincidence allows linkages between the author's life and work, but it should be clear that the resulting literary form is neither an autobiographical novel nor a philosophical novel. Rather, it is a novel engendered by an earnest commitment, one which stands at a remove from contemporary sentiments and literary practices, to explore and establish personal truths in the place of lost conventional, institutional, aesthetic, and spiritual truths. Historically, this impetus can be seen as a somewhat predictable outgrowth of the so-called crisis in belief that reached its zenith in Europe and Britain during the early and mid-nineteenth century when the advent of modern ideas of gender, psychology, evolution, politics, science, and economics—all those damnable discoveries that have blasted religion from top to bottom in the last two hundred years—prompted a variety of responses from the intelligentsia of the day (216).

In this regard, Symbolism, especially with reference to its novel, must be seen as contiguous with the history of

ideas, of culture, of literature that is typically labelled "Realist" or "Victorian." That is, the Symbolist novel elaborates on nearly a century worth of effort spent on the problematic nature of truth, for the period of time that had Victoria on the throne (1837 to 1901) was an era that might be defined as one of intense epistemic uncertainty. My reading of Huysmans' A Rebours will foreground the Symbolist contribution to the enduring debate over the nature and grounds of knowledge and what currency the notion of truth might hold by highlighting the manner in which the novel mobilizes a very simple, quite banal, type of literary symbol in the service of a larger Symbolist project.

The symbol takes many guises, but at its root, the martyr is Huysmans' means of showing the contestatory and, in his era, increasingly personal nature, of truth. By "martyr" I mean that Huysmans shapes A Rebours by depicting what might be called a martyrological miscellany that is designed to show that the stakes in the game of the truth are always high, mortally so. This interpretive key—the *Stichwort* of the book—is compressed into Des Esseintes' fascination, seemingly only a decadent obsession, with the macabre quality of Jan Luyken's illustrations. The passage that describes Luyken's art is worth quoting at length:

> Il possédait de cet atriste fantasque et lugubre, véhément et farouche, la série de ses *Persécutions religieuses*, d'épouvantables planches contenant

tous les supplices que la folie des religions a inventés, des planches où hurlait le spectacle des souffrances humaines, des corps rissolés sur des brasiers, des crânes décalottés avec des sabres, trépanés avec les clous, entaillés avec des scies, des intestins dévidés du ventre et enroulés sur des bobines, des ongles lentement arrachés avec des tenailles, des prunelles crevées, des paupières retournées avec des pointes, des membres disloqués, cassés avec soin, des os mis à nu, longuement râclés avec des lames. (81-82)

He possessed a whole series of studies by this artist in lugubrious fantasy and ferocious cruelty: his *Religious Persecutions*, a collection of appalling plates displaying all the tortures which religious fanaticism has invented, revealing all the agonizing varieties of human suffering—bodies roasted over braziers, heads scalped with swords, trepanned with nails, lacerated with nails, bowels taken out of the belly and wound on to bobbins, finger-nails slowly removed with pincers, eyes put out, eyelids pinned back, limbs dislocated and carefully broken, bones laid bare and scraped for hours with knives. (70-

71)][15]

This passage, from Chapter Five, describes some of the art Des Esseintes places on his boudoir walls. The symbol, the one in service of the Symbolist project, is that of human suffering, in this case, Anabaptists being persecuted by the Roman Church, concretizes the human cost of unflinchingly defending personal convictions. In both cases—the Roman Catholic attempt to expunge Protestant behaviour and the Protestant stance itself—lays bare the cost of moving against the grain. A Rebours, then, is a novel that mobilizes a quite complex set of events, characters, images, and symbols to show that every generation or every historical epoch must find and defend its own truth, at whatever cost. Historically, of course, this very idea put down one of its tap roots at the end of the nineteenth century, so the Symbolist novel is but one branch on the tree that grew up in the search for some form of epistemic certainty. The Symbolist novel, then, is a modern form of literature in as much as it wants to articulate truth even though its author is painfully aware of the fact that the conditions for truth—be they religious, artistic, scientific, or otherwise—have grown inescapably relativistic. The martyr, or more properly perhaps, the torture of those who remain convinced of truth, is the

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[15] All translations of A Rebours are from Robert Baldick's J.-K. Huysmans, Against Nature.

excruciating symbol of A Rebours, albeit one that is often opaque and strangely urbane in its cerebral, or philosophical nature. Thus, Symbolism, as this reading of A Rebours will show, anticipated the relativism and subjectivism of the twentieth century by turning inward to a realm of private meaning. This realm, to create a kind of functional shorthand that will serve the present inquiry, is best called Hermeticism.

In the Symbolist novel, Hermeticism forms the most important meeting point between philosophy and the occult.[16] Hermeticism—the belief in the hidden nature of truth, or secret knowledge, from Hermes Trismegistos—is a belief in a system of correspondences between the spiritual and material worlds, one that only a few diviners or artists can discern and present in the shape of a symbol, the meaning of which only other initiates can grasp, and which eludes the multitude. Baudelaire, in literature, would be the equivalent of a seer-poet just as Swedenborg a philosopher-diviner in the occult; both made connections between the visible and invisible worlds. The persistent desire to penetrate the veil to a transcendent reality is common to both Symbolism and the occult.[17] The visions or art works of

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[16] For the origin of the term "Hermeticism" see, for example, Andrew F. Walls' "Hermetic Literature" in Elwell, 508.

[17] It is in the second half of the nineteenth century that "les terms d'ésotérisme et d'occultisme à être employés

these seers could only be understood, using Wayne Schumaker's terminology, by "especially `fit' readers and admirers of art" (19). My argument, then, sidesteps the commonly held critical notion that the Symbolist novel was a poor or, at best, opaque, art form by foregrounding and examining its constitutive elements within their historical context.[18]

Influenced by both Schopenhauer and the occult, Huysmans emplaced his own hermetic work into what has become the Symbolist canon: his A Rebours, the "breviary of Decadence" (Symons qtd. by Baldick, Intro. to Against Nature 13). Huysmans' success, for A Rebours became a kind of secular scripture for the Decadents, akin to the Hebrew scriptural Books such as Exodus, Ecclesiastes, and Job, which are all about retreating, pessimism, and suffering, is noteworthy. Indeed, Calinescu refers to A Rebours as "the *summa* of decadence, an encyclopaedia of decadent tastes and idiosyncrasies in matters covering the whole range from cuisine to literature" (172).

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courammenent, . . . Le mot "occultisme" se trouve pour la première fois, en français, dans l'oeuvre d'Eliphas Levi, comme le fait remarquer Robert Amadou qui en donne lui-même la définition suivante: "L'occultisme est l'ensemble des doctrines et des pratiques fondées sur le théorie des correspondances" (Mercier 13).

[18] See N.S. Gumilev, for example, who criticizes French and Russian Symbolists for their weaknesses in the area of the novel in his "Nasledie simvolizma i akmeizm" in Trifonov, 426-28.

Hence Huysmans' A Rebours offers an opportunity to elaborate on my larger thesis; namely, that as a form of secular scripture the Symbolist novel embodies not only the tenets of a literary movement but also the author's own spiritual quest. In Huysmans' case, his journey led him through the pessimism of Schopenhauer, occultism and Satanism, and, finally, to a mystical and unorthodox Catholicism. To create a pattern, it can be said that spiritual curiosity led to spiritual deepening, and spiritual deepening to a deeper kind of novel, calling for a more discerning reading strategy. I will demonstrate this dynamic interplay between the personal and the literary by considering A Rebours partly as spiritual autobiography,[19] and partly as the makings of a Symbolist novel.

Schopenhauer and Huysmans' A Rebours

Schopenhauer became the philosopher of choice at the end of the nineteenth century for Huysmans and for many others who searched for a literature beyond realism and naturalism. Théodule Ribot's La Philosophie de Schopenhauer was

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[19] Huysmans' novels are all autobiographical; "Des Esseintes, with his particular ideas, fetishes, and exquisite hypersensitivity, may be seen as a product of Huysmans' innermost being" (Delevoy, 50). Furthermore, these excerpts from Huysmans' own autobiography, written in the third person, under the pseudonym of A. Meunier, attest to the fact: "Folantin and des Esseintes, are in fact one and the same person, situated in different milieux. And it is perfectly obvious that this person is none other than M. Huysmans himself" (Baldick, *The Life*, 99).

published in 1874 in France, and it became immensely popular in Decadent and Symbolist circles. Ribot's translation of Schopenhauer's essential doctrines as represented in his Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (1818) did not appear until 1888. Schopenhauer's Aphorisms/Parerga and Paralipomena established his fame, and, published much later than The World in 1851, only reached France in translation by 1880 (Baldick 68). Huysmans read Schopenhauer's Aphorisms before beginning his A Rebours; the German philosopher's subjective contemplation of the world and theories of pessimism, the vanity of existence, and suffering held special appeal for him. However, Schopenhauer appealed to Huysmans less as a philosopher and more as a theologian or spiritual writer, for the story of A Rebours unfolds in a way that moves its central character, Des Esseintes, through a series of spiritual stages that resemble very closely the traditional purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways of the Christian spiritual writers. There is, thus, a paradoxical element in A Rebours, one that moves, as the title suggests, against the grain, for no Schopenhaurian apotheosis is reached; rather, by the book's end, Schopenhauer is rejected.

A Rebours (1884) was originally supposed to be a continuation of Huysmans' previous novel, A Vau-l'Eau/With the Flow (1882), a kind of extension of his musings on Schopenhaurian aphorisms (Baldick, 79). Folantin, the protagonist of the earlier novel, has a pessimistic outlook

on life, believing, as Schopenhauer does, that happiness is a pathetic illusion and that life is full of suffering and disappointments. Initially, in A Rebours, Des Esseintes is a steadfast follower of Schopenhauer as well. When stirrings of faith, doubt, and fear filled his anguished soul, Des Esseintes calms himself by resorting to Schopenhauer: "Schopenhauer était plus exact" ("Schopenhauer, in his opinion, came nearer to the truth") than the theologians (110; 92). The philosopher "ne prétendait rien guérir, n'offrait aux malades aucune compensation, aucun espoir; mais sa théorie du Pessimisme étiat, en somme, la grande consolatrice des intelligences choisies, des âmes élevées" ("claimed no cures, offered the sick no compensation, no hope; but when all was said and done, his theory of Pessimism was the great comforter of superior minds and lofty souls") (111; 93).

In a Schopenhauerian fit of utter disdain for the world, especially its occupants, Des Esseintes retreats to a solitary existence in Fontenay, his house in a Parisian suburb. Huysmans' reading of such essays as "On the Suffering of the World," "On the Vanity of Existence," and "On Thinking for Yourself" is evident here;[20] Des Esseintes' solution in preserving some cultural dignity in himself is to withdraw from the hated and hateful world. He surrounds

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[20] See Schopenhauer's Essays and Aphorisms, 41-54, 89-94.

himself with art and ideas of men of genius found in painting and literature. In the nineteenth century, Schopenhauer was one of the clearest proponents of the contemplation of art, which are the works of genius, as a means for humans to strive for the highest and eternal. In his The World, he describes art as the vehicle for the invisible essence of things:

> But what kind of knowledge is concerned with that which is outside and independent of all relations, that which alone is really essential to the world, the true content of its phenomena, that which is subject to no change, and therefore is known with equal truth for all time, in a word, the *ideas*, which are the direct and adequate objectivity of the thing in itself, the will? We answer, *art*, the work of genius. It repeats or reproduces the eternal ideas grasped through pure contemplation, the essential and abiding in all the phenomena of the world; and according to what the material is in which it reproduces, it is sculpture or painting, poetry or music. (The World 476)

Des Esseintes goes even further than the admiration of the German philosopher's dictums; he follows them to the extreme in his physical withdrawal from the world to contemplate art and ideas of genii at Fontenay. The pursuit and criticism of art become his life.

The protagonist of A Rebours, however, does not remain in seclusion forever. Due to his failing health, his physician gives Des Esseintes two choices at the end of the novel: "il [des Esseintes] fallait quitter cette solitude, revenir à Paris, rentrer dans la vie commune, tâcher enfin de se distraire comme les autres" ("he [Des Esseintes] would have to abandon this solitary existence, to go back to Paris, to lead a normal life again, above all to try and enjoy the same pleasures as other people"), or else die (282; 211). The first option sounds like a veritable damnation to Des Esseintes, for he does not enjoy "les plaisirs des autres" ("the pleasures other people enjoy") (282; 211). If one were to judge the outcome of the novel according to Schopenhauer then Des Esseintes' could not have sustained his lifestyle either, for, according to the German philosopher, all aesthetic experience is fleeting and man returns to the arena of human preoccupations, over and over again. Schopenhauer writes: "So near us always lies a sphere in which we escape from all our misery [in contemplating art or nature]; but who has the strength to continue long in it?" (The World 478). Indeed, by the end of the novel, Des Esseintes has run out of strength. It is not clear what he will do, yet in the final lines of the novel his appeal is not to Schopenhauer, but, albeit rhetorically, to faith, the life of faith, and to the perils of the contemplative

life.[21]

There exists in Huysmans' life a coincidental impetus, one that matches the kind of autobiographical urge that characterizes the Symbolist novel. In the late 1880s, Huysmans became disillusioned with Schopenhauer's philosophy, and embarked on a "spiritual quest" (Beaumont 63). Similarly, toward the end of A Rebours Des Esseintes' belief in Schopenhauerian philosophy begins to wane, until he gives it up completely:

> Il appelait à l'aide pour se cicatriser, les consolantes maximes de Schopenhauer; . . mais les mots résonnaient, dans son esprit comme des sons privés de sens; son ennui les désagrégeait, leur ôtait toute signification, toute vertu sédative, toute vigueur effective et douce.
>
> Il s'apercevait enfin que les raisonnements du pessimisme étaient impuissants à le soulager, que l'impossible croyance en une vie future serait seule apaisante. (293)

To soothe his wounded spirit he called upon the

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[21] It can be argued that, at the end of the novel, Des Esseites does go back to life and nature, and that a definitive position between Naturalism and Symbolism cannot be attained. For a discussion on Huysmans' novel between Naturalism and Symbolism, see François Levi's book J.-K. Huysmans, À rebours et l'esprit décadent (Paris: Nizet), 1972. I am indebted to professor Anna Gural-Migdal for this information.

> consoling maxims of Schopenhauer, . . . but the words echoed in his mind like meaningless noises, his weariness of spirit breaking them up, stripping them of all significance, all sedative virtue, all effective and soothing force. He realized at last that the arguments of pessimism were powerless to comfort him, that only the impossible belief in a future life could bring him peace of mind. (219)

By "a future life" the narrator refers to a surprisingly orthodox commitment to faith; he could not forget "ce catholicisme si poétique, si poignant, dans lequel il avait baigné et dont il avait jadis absorbé l'essence par tous les pores" ("the poetic and poignant atmosphere of Catholicism in which he had been steeped as a boy, and whose essence he had absorbed through every pore") (112-13; 93). Huysmans, in his Preface written twenty years after the publication of A Rebours, echoes Des Esseintes' rejection of Schopenhauer, and also connects his Schopenhaurian belief to the one he found in Scripture:

> Je me croyais loin de la religion pourtant! Je ne songeais pas que, de Schopenhauer que j'admirais plus que de raison, à l'*Ecclésiaste* et au *Livre de Job*, il n'a avait qu'un pas. Les prémisses sur le Pessimisme sont les mêmes, seulement, lorsqu'il s'agit de conclure, le philosophe se dérobe.

J'aimais ses idées sur l'horreur de la vie, sur la bêtise du monde, sur l'inclémence de la destinée; je les aime également dans les Livres Saints; mais les observations de Schopenhauer n'aboutissent à rien; il vous laisse, pour ainsi parler, en plan; ses aphorismes ne sont, en somme, qu'un herbier de plaintes sèches; l'Église, elle, explique les origines et les causes, signale les fins, présente les remèdes; elle ne se contente pas de vous donner une consultation d'âme, elle vous traite et elle vous guérit, alors que le médicastre allemand, après vous avoir bien démontré que l'affection don't vous souffrez est incurable, vous tourne, en ricanant, le dos. (vii-viii)

Yet I supposed myself far from Religion all the time! I did not dream that from Schopenhauer, whom I admired beyond all reason, to Ecclesiastes and the Book of Job was only a step. The premises as to Pessimism are identical, only when it comes to action, the Philosopher shirks away. I like his ideas on the horror of existence, on the stupidity of the world, on the harshness of fate; I like them just as well in the Holy Books. But Schopenhauer's observations end in nothing; he leaves you, so to say, in the lurch; his

> aphorisms, in fact, are but a *hortus siccus* of lifeless specimens. The Church for her part explains origins and causes, certifies results, offers remedies; she is not satisfied with giving you a spiritual consultation, she treats you and cures you, while the German quack, after clearly showing you that the complaint you suffer from is incurable, turns his back on you with a sardonic grin. (xxxvi)

Although Huysmans did not embrace Catholicism fully until his conversion in 1892, this passage from his Symbolist novel, in 1884, displays part of the process of a literary search for truth that parallels an ongoing process of moving to a faith commitment that concerns itself with "origins and causes." A Rebours, then, as a title uncannily anticipates a later crossroad of belief and disbelief, of rejection and acceptance of both Schopenhauer and Catholicism that shows Des Esseintes moving against the grain of his historical and aesthetic context, just as Huysmans did in later years.

Occultism and Secular Scripture

Part of Des Esseintes' journey includes a way station of occult spiritualism, a stage that can be called a means to an end.[22] The appeal that the occult held for many

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[22] It must be acknowledged that some critics would draw little distinction between the occult and Catholicism.

Symbolists is readily understood when one considers the similarities in thinking between the two. Choucha states that occultism, as opposed to traditional religion or materialist positivism, is "a more flexible and subjective system of thought, which explains its appeal to writers and artists" of the time (12). Choucha elaborates:

> Because occultism is traditionally a secret doctrine, it is veiled in a certain amount of obscurity and ambiguity and is hence so attractive a system to artists and poets, since it can be interpreted and applied according to the individual desire. (121)

Symons shows well the similarities between the occult and Symbolism by revealing the systematic sweep of the Symbolist agenda when he asks, "What is Symbolism if not an establishing of the links which hold the world together, the affirmation of an eternal, minute, intricate, almost invisible life, which runs through the whole universe?" (146). The instrumental capacity of what Choucha calls "individual desire" coupled with "obscurity and ambiguity" served well the Symbolists' refusal to allow the dominance of religious, political, or materialistic, or any other popularly held norms, to regulate their own lives and their own hyper-individualism. In Huysmans' case, the occult

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Indeed, in certain expressions of Catholicism, such as in Haiti, it melds nearly completely with what might be called the occult.

provides a doorway into the idiosyncratic mind of his character, Des Esseintes.

Huysmans' introduction to the occult began in his days as an art critic in the early 1880s, more specifically, with his reviews of Gustave Moreau's paintings and his contemporaneous research for his novel A Rebours (Ridge 24). Huysmans obviously found Moreau's work captivating, for it serves as a central image of Chapter Five. Moreau's lavish interpretations of the beheading of John the Baptist belong especially to the oil canvas "Salome Dancing Before Herod" (1876) and the watercolour "The Apparition" (1876).[23] In A Rebours, Des Esseintes buys these two canvases for no other reason than to let them form the substance of his dreams each night. The suggestiveness of the step is inescapable: not only does Des Esseintes fill his conscious but also his unconscious mind with images that attempt to go beyond the waking and the canonical norm. That is, Des Esseintes had read time and again the scene of Salome's dance for Herod, the end of which would cause the Baptizer's death, from his "la vieille bible de Pierre Variquet, traduite par les docteurs en théologie de l'Université de Louvain" ("old Bible of Pierre Variquet, translated by the Doctors of

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[23] Moreau painted "Salome" in 1876 and another canvas of the same name some time around 1890. These two works are closer studies of Salome as a solitary figure. Huysmans unquestionably describes "Salome Dancing Before Herod" in A Rebours.

the University of Louvain"), but none of the Gospels, "ni saint Mathieu, ni saint Marc, ni saint Luc, ni les autres évangelistes ne s'étendaient sur les charmes délirants, sur les actives dépravations de la danseuse" ("neither St Matthew, nor St Mark, nor St Luke, nor any of the other sacred writers had enlarged on the maddening charm and potent depravity of the dancer") (73; 65). The obsessive, fetishistic nature of Des Esseintes' fascination with Moreau's Salome is charged with eroticism, but the real attraction seems purely coincidental.

For Des Esseintes, Moreau's conception of Salome goes "en dehors de toutes les données du Testament" ("beyond the data supplied by the New Testament") to a fortuitous convergence with "cette Salomé, surhumaine et étrange qu'il avait rêvée" ("the weird and superhuman Salome of his dreams"(74; 65). The realm of Des Esseintes' dreams is the hermetic place that forms the very texture of A Rebours, especially the fifth chapter. This portion of the book most closely creates a correspondence between the metaphoric furniture of Des Esseintes' imagination and his residence at Fontenay. On one hand, this correspondence thematizes an occult principle of accord between the microcosm and the macrocosm, and, on the other hand, it sets in motion a veritable bricolage of associatively linked symbols that serve to show Des Esseintes as a kind of heuristic zealot, one who suffers mental anguish—a morbidly refined one—

seeking a kinship with history's examples of suffering for the truth, as well as the attendant brutality associated with interrogating and punishing that position.

The kinship here takes at least two forms. First, Des Esseintes selects art—from Moreau and Luykens—that depicts persecution and suffering, for he suffers in his cause—the decadent pursuit of hidden truth. Second, he mediates obsessively on the pastiche at work in Moreau's work; that is, both paintings contain elements of Greek and Egyptian mythology, Buddhism, and Christianity, namely, a heterogeneous and occult tradition: "elle appartenait aux théogonies de l'extrême Orient; elle ne relevait plus des traditions bibliques" ("she [the figure of Salome, central to both paintings] belonged to the theogonies of the Far East; she no longer had her origin in the Biblical tradition" (74; 66). This reference to "Biblical tradition" functions in apposition to the received canon of scripture; so Huysmans effectively moves his reader into the realm of the gnostic, of the apocryphal, the fantastic, into the realm of secret truth for initiates. The occult thus figures as a symbolic way of sensitizing a reader so that he searches for a finer, more subtle truth. Put another way, the occult elements of A Rebours symbolize the hidden nature of truth, and the gruesome depictions of beheading and torture are not so much religious martyrs as they are martyrs to saints of personal conviction.

By shifting the reader's focus in Chapter Five from the verbal to the visual, Huysmans appears to display the inability of the imagination to articulate in words its entry into the private realm of personal conviction. Huymans, through Des Esseintes, thus invites his reader to notice that truth will not be found in the obvious, and that in an increasingly bourgeois age, one that only displays moral and aesthetic decay, the only real option for the zealot is to adopt an insane commitment to reaching beyond the surface of materialism. In this regard, then, Huysmans actually breaches the Symbolist credo in that he deigns to show his reader *how* to read: deeply, weirdly, associatively, imaginatively, unrestrainedly, most importantly at this juncture in the book, heretically. "Breach," of course, is too strong a term, for rather than telling his reader how to read, Huysmans puts on a demonstration that is meant to offend any one unprepared to reach into its subtleties. More needs to be said on this point, but that discussion lies ahead; for the present, it is necessary to amplify on the elements that form the bricolage of Chapter 5.

By means of Moreau's "Salome Dancing before Herod" and "The Apparition" Huysmans expresses what is absent from the canonical record, but does so in a way that shows two sides of a symbolist or transcendental equation. In "Salome Dancing Before Herod" Des Esseintes finds the dancer "effacée, se perdait, mystérieuese et pâmée, dans le

brouillard lointain des siècles, insaisissable pour les espris précis et terre à terre, accessible suelement aux cervelles ébranlées, aiguisées, comme rendues visionnaires par la névrose" ("a dim and distant figure, lost in a mysterious ecstasy far off in the mists of time, beyond the reach of the punctilious, pedestrian minds, and accessible only to brains shaken and sharpened and rendered almost clairvoyant by neurosis" (73-74; 65). Des Esseintes thus places Moreau's work, but more importantly Salome, into the realm of the hieratic—into a realm that is for the most part out of reach. Salome becomes to Des Esseintes a storehouse of misogynist symbols, all of them "indifférente, irresponsible, insensible, empoisonnant" ("indifferent, irresponsible, insensible, poisoning"), but, ultimately, his fascination is not with the woman, but with the artist who rendered her (74; 66). Proof of this point lies in Des Esseintes' estimation of "The Apparition" where he finds that "la déesse s'était évanouie" (the "goddess vanished") and in her place an "plus exécrable et plus exquise" (even more "hateful yet exquisite" embodiment of "tempérament de femme" ("female temperament") shows forth (78; 68); but his ruminations turn to Moreau where he finds "ce grand artiste, . . ce païen mystique" ("this great artist, this mystical pagan") the possessor of sorcery that brings to life "les cruelles visions, les féeriques apothéoses des autres âges" ("the awful visions and magical apotheoses of other ages")

(79; 69). In the death of John the Baptist and in Moreau's depiction of his martyred rebirth, for the head in "The Apparition" is that of John and very much alive in "les traits ardents échappés de la tête du Précurseur" ("the brilliant rays emanating from the Precursor's head"), Huysmans offers birth and rebirth—the classical topoi and Christian mysteries of what lies beyond comprehension (77; 68). Thus, these two canvases serve to dramatize the totality of attempting to enter the realm of clairvoyance, that is of a different epistemic register.

The language of Chapter Five bears out this reading. Des Esseintes leaves Paris to seek out "quelques œuvres suggestives le jetant dans un monde inconnu" ("evocative works which would transport him to some unfamiliar world" (71; 63). These "œuvres suggestives" evoke "d'érudites hystéries" and "des cauchemars compliqués," as well as "visions nonchalantes et atroces" (71). More of these occur by visual means, that is, by reference to other key works of art that decorate Des Esseintes' Fontenay residence.

Rodolphe Bresdin's "Comedy of Death," the same author's "The Good Samaritan," and what appears to be a number of works by the painter Odilon Redon—likely "The Crying Spider," "The Eye Balloon," and his "Cactus Man" also populate Des Esseintes' walls. Where these works are both fantastic and gruesome, for they conjure up memories of "des nuits brûlantes, des affreuses visions" ("feverish nights

and frightful nightmares" for Des Esseintes, he also possesses another visual register altogether in the work of El Greco, that is "Theotocopuli" (86; 73, 74). This unnamed canvas is described as a "sinistre" study of Christ "aux tons de cirage et de vert cadavre" (in tones of "boot polish blacks and cadaverous greens", and "d'une énergie détraquee" ("frenzied energy"); it is perhaps El Greco's "The Agony in the Garden"[24] (74; 87, 86). This supposition is difficult to ascertain, but thematically it is safe to say that by means of Moreau, Luyken, Bresdin, Redon, and El Greco Huysmans creates a tableau centred on themes of intense suffering, all—except Redon's work—of it associated with the Gospel stories. Des Esseintes' art shrine, then, is one dedicated not so much to faith as to personal conviction. There is present, of course, a good deal of Decadent irony, for when overcome by the "indéfinissable malaise" of these works, Des Esseintes turns his gaze to "une figure de la Mélancolie" ("the figure of Melancholy") (86; 73). In this instance, Huysmans wants to continue in the visual register, but the intertextuality of Melancholy is perhaps too rich, for "une désolation en quelque sorte alaguie" ("the langorous sorrow")(86; 74) that she evokes in Des Esseintes recalls John Milton's "Goddess, sage and holy/ . . . divinest Melancholy" ("Il Penseroso" 11-12). This moment provides a

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[24] To view this painting by El Greco online go to www.abcgallery.com/Elelgreco.

turning point in Chapter Five, for Des Esseintes turns his contemplation to the subject of bedroom decoration. He concludes that only two options are available: the "Louis-Quinze style" with its "d'une atmosphère vicieuse" ("wholly depraved atmosphere") or, and this was the only one for him, the bedroom had to be "façonner une chambre en ceilui monastique" ("turned into a facsimile of a monastery cell") (87-88; 74-75).

Des Esseintes, in keeping with Decadent sensibilities refuses, however, to put up with "l'austére laideur" ("the austere ugliness") that characterizes the monastic cell (88; 75). Accordingly, Des Esseintes chooses to use "elegance and distinction" in his furnishings, but to do so while preserving the "essential ugliness" of the prayer cell. This paradoxical move is one that places on view the correspondence between the novel's settings and the inscape of Des Esseintes' imagination. In effect, his imagination is becoming a shrine, one that embraces the only analogy Des Esseintes finds capable of expressing his own pilgrimmage, that is his aesthetic and spiritual state. He finds, surprisingly,

> il se sentait une réelle sympathie pour ces gens enfermés dans des monastères, persécutés par une haineuse société qui ne leur pardonne ni le juste mépris qu'ils ont pour elle ni la volonté qu'ils affirment de racheter, d'expier, par un long

> silence, le dévergondage toujours croissant de ses conversations saugrenues ou niaisea. (90)

> a genuine fellow-feeling for those who were shut up in religious houses, persecuted by a vindictive society that cannot forgive either the proper contempt they feel for it or their averred intention of redeeming and expiating by years of silence the ever-increasing licentiousness of its silly, senseless conversations. (76-77)

This moment of expressed empathy recalls and grounds my earlier point. That is, Des Esseintes sees himself as a martyr, one who suffers the indignity of living in lesser times, in lesser art and consequence than those of classical Hellenic and Roman moments, those of ancient Israel, those of the apostolic times, those of the Renaissance. More importantly, Des Esseintes sees himself without a heroic or prophetic voice, one that would champion a cause. Rather, he views himself as the outcast— "tel qu'un ermite . . . tel qu'un moine" ("an eremite . . . a monk")—as the martyr who will suffer for seeing a lost, a hidden, a higher beauty and truth than those around him (90; 76). Des Esseintes' turn to the monastic life stands, however, not so much as an exploration of mystic life as it does as a literary conceit for moving to a different epistemic register, to one that is a higher tier that cannot bear rational examination.

Huysmans' way to this mystical plane is via Decadence, as a literary mode and lifestyle, complete with the occult practices which the *fin-de-siécle* movement necessitated. The text of the novel, whole chapters of which read like Scripture, albeit secular, reveals Huysmans' spiritual quest. In A Rebours Huysmans "develops the entire psychology, or better, philosophy, or better still, religion of the Decadent movement" (Ridge 112). A Rebours became the Bible for those who aspired to being Decadents; this novel indeed became the guidebook to would-be Decadents, in word or lifestyle. The canon, however, is one that is meant to be read allegorically, not for its plain sense, but for its hidden meanings.

Thus, when Huysmans lays out Decadent doctrine, all the way from decor and furnishings to judging art and literature, he again mobilizes a correspondence between the physical setting of the novel's universe and the inner texture of his protagonist's imagination. In the next portion of A Rebours Des Esseintes' detailed descriptions of and the reasons for choosing certain objects and materials recall the minute instructions for decorating the tabernacle, or the holy of holies, in the book of Exodus.[25]

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[25] For an additional perspective on the importance of the art of decorating, see Edgar Allan Poe's essay, "Philosophy of Furniture." Although Poe is not addressed in this dissertation, there is a striking similarity between

This impetus is one that sets up a shrine to the imagination. It is fitting here to compare the Exodus of the ancient Israelites from Egypt with that of Des Esseintes' leaving of Paris; both parties take what is most sacred to them with them while abandoning the places that oppressed them.

Temples and tabernacles are "structures built for the worship of gods" (Noll 1067). Instructions to the Israelites on how to build and decorate such a tabernacle are found in Exodus 25-31. Des Esseintes' instructions to his craftsmen in decorating his own dwelling at Fontenay are similar to those in the Old Testament, but the protagonist of A Rebours fills his sanctuary with venerated Catholic objects instead. The difference arises in the purpose of building such a shrine. Where the ancient Israelites and the Catholic Church built shrines to contain objects that were symbols of the covenant between them and their God, Des Esseintes' objects, although taken from ecclesiastical warehouses and antique dealers, worship and symbolize quite a different relationship.

In Exodus, tabernacle "refers to a set of ten linen curtains, which when draped round a structure of wooden frames formed God's dwelling-place" (Gooding 1157). The

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Poe's instructions and those of Des Esseintes'. Of course, Baudelaire was a devoted pupil of Poe. These are interesting connections for further research; I thank professor Milan Dimic for his suggestions regarding this topic.

colours for the curtains were blue, purple and red, "with figures of cherubim" woven into the tapestry-work (Gooding 1157). The curtains have "loops of blue material along the edge" (Exodus 26:4). And the whole tent is covered with tanned animal skins or leather (Exodus 26:14). Des Esseintes' colour scheme for his house is predominantly orange, with blue as a background colour (21; 30), with a ceiling covered in leather:

> le plafond, un peu arrondi, également tendu de maroquin, ouvrit tel qu'un immense œil-de-bœuf, enchâssé dans sa peau d'orange, un cercle de firmament en soie bleu de roi, au milieu duquel montaient, à tire-d'ailes, des séraphins d'argent, naguère brodés par al confrérie des tisserands de Cologne, pour une ancienne chape." (21)

> The ceiling, which was slightly coved, was also covered in morocco; and set in the middle of the orange leather, like a huge circular window open to the sky, there was a piece of royal-blue silk from an ancient cope on which silver seraphim had been depicted in angelic flight by the weavers' guild of Cologne (30).

Angelic figures—cherubim and seraphim—woven into fabric appear on both the veils of the tabernacle and the curtain on Des Esseintes' ceiling; the Fontenay piece is made out of

an ecclesiastical vestment. The curtains on his windows are red as well: "de rideaux taillés dans de vieilles étoles, dont l'or assombri et quasi sauré, s'éteignait la trame d'un roux presque mort" ("curtains cut out of old ecclesiastical stoles, whose faded gold threads were almost invisible against the dull red material" (22; 31). The similarity in materials used for the frame of each dwelling is remarkable, as are the colour palettes and patterns in the fabric.

Inside, the tabernacle consisted of two compartments, "the Holy Place" and the "the Most Holy Place" (Exodus 26:33); these both seem to underlie the hermetically sealed rooms or compartments in Des Esseintes' house. Only the absolute chosen ones are allowed in: the priests in the Old Testament, and a few select painters and writers, by the way of their works, in A Rebours. In "the Most Holy Place" stood the ark of the covenant, a box containing duplicate copies of the tablets of the law and other sacred objects (Ex. 25:10-22). This is the place where God speaks to his chosen priest. Strikingly, Baudelaire stands at the centre of Des Esseintes' house; his works are the altarpiece; more specifically, the singular editions of the poet's works which their admirer had himself commissioned:

> sur la cheminée dont la robe fut, elle aussi, découpée dans la somptueuse étoffe d'une dalmatique florentine, entre duex ostensoirs, en cuivre doré, de styl byzantin, provenant de

l'ancienne Abbaye-au-Bois de Bièvre, un merveilleus canon d'église, aux trois compartiments séparés, ouvragés comme une dentelle, contint, sous le verre de son cadre, copiées sur un authentique vélin, avec d'admirables lettres de missel et de splendides enluminures, trois pièces de Baudelaire: à droit et à gauche, les sonnets portant ces titres "la Mort des Amants"-"l'Ennemi";-au milieu, le poème en prose intitulé: "*any where out of the world*.-N'importe où, hors du monde." (22-23)

in the centre of the chimney-piece, which was likewise dressed in sumptuous silk from a Florentine dalmatic, and flanked by two Byzantine monstrances of gilded copper which had originally come from the Abbaye-au-Bois at Bièvre, there stood a magnificent triptych whose separate panels had been fashioned to resemble lace-work. This now contained, framed under glass, copied on real vellum in exquisite missal lettering and marvellously illuminated, three pieces by Baudelaire: on the right and left, the sonnets *La Mort des amants* and *L'Ennemi*, and in the middle, the prose poems bearing the English title *Anywhere out of the World*. (31)

To read passages in A Rebours such as these is like an instruction in religious rites, only here homage is paid to a literary god—Baudelaire.

Des Esseintes' appropriation of sacred objects in order to worship a secular Decadent god—Baudelaire—is expressed in the triptych containing three poems from Les Fleurs du mal. A triptych is the altarpiece, consisting of a central panel and two smaller ones that close over the main one. It is placed behind and above the altar table, where communion has been held since New Testament times and where the bread of the Presence was placed in the Old Testament. Usually Christ's image occupies the central panel, with perhaps two other saints on the side panels. Huysmans places Baudelaire's prose poems at the centre. In A Rebours the cult of artificial creation is celebrated, with Baudelaire as its creator. Des Esseintes' minute descriptions of the details of his sanctuary from the world are explicit directions to a Decadent tabernacle.

A guide to Decadence would be incomplete without regulations regarding personal dress. When it comes to his own attire, Des Esseintes' preaches a sermon to his tailors and haberdashers on the Decadent style. For this purpose,

> il avait fait préparer une haute salle, destinée à la réception de ses fournisseurs; ils entraient, s'asseyaient les uns à côté des autres, dans des stalles d'église, et alors il montait dans une

> chaire magistrale et prêchait le sermonn sur le dandysme, adjurant ses bottiers et ses tailleurs de se conformer, de la façon la plus absolue, à ses brefs en matière de coupe, les menaçant d'une excommunication pécuniaire s'ils ne suivaient pas, à la lettre, les instructions contenues dans ses monitoires et ses bulles. (15-16)

> he fit up a lofty hall in which to receive his tradesmen. They used to troop in and take their places side by side in a row of church stalls; then he would ascend an imposing pulpit and preach them a sermon on dandyism, adjusting his bootmakers and tailors to conform strictly to his encyclicals on matters of cut, and threatening them with pecuniary excommunication if they did not follow to the letter the instructions contained in his monitories and bulls (26-27).

The matter of dress is to be taken very seriously by the Decadent; the solemn religious language underlines the weight placed on appearance; the attire is as important as the vestments of priests, rich with symbolism.

Huysmans' use of sacred objects in order to deify the secular, or, better said, artistic is one of the major motifs of A Rebours. Many Symbolists and Decadents were attracted to the ritualistic, mysterious, and sensuous art

of the Catholic Church, *sans foi*. Des Esseintes' choice in paintings, and his Bible itself, imparts his desire to surround himself with religious objects not for the sake of religion, but for the sake of having the refined, the rare, and the artistic. The old Bible of Pierre Variquet is a rarity, with its engraved frontpiece and binding of supple vellum, with ornate, detailed letters of the title, encased in a coffer with gilded plates. It is a mystery how Des Esseintes came to possess this sole edition, commissioned by Pierre Variquet for his own use and that of the members of his family exclusively.

Huysmans' here makes the connection between sacred objects, occult paintings, religious furnishings, Baudelaire's prose poems, Symbolism, which does not express but suggest, and their common denominator—art, which is the symbolic expression of the deepest stirrings of the soul, of things eternal, but more important, of things that exist in an epistemic register that is accessible only to the initiate.

This aspect of the novel can be amplified extensively. Des Esseintes' surrounds himself with sacred furniture and objects, such as would be used in the Catholic Sacraments of confession, communion, and baptism, but the discrepancy between the intended use of these sacred objects and his actual use of them is glaring. For example, Des Esseintes substitutes the work of the seventeenth-century French

scholar for the antiphonary, which is a book of psalms and verses for singing in response, on his antique lectern. An old dictionary of common and "infamous" Latin words replaces the sacred words of the psalms; here the deacons would have to read from "the weighty folios of Du Cange's *Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinatis*" (31). Secular words replace religious words; common words and their usage and grammar rules are venerated instead of verses of praise.

Further examples are seen in Des Esseintes' use of an ancient baptismal font as a washbasin in his dressing-room (118). The Baudelairian centrepiece described above comes with priestly vestments. Everything is in place for the celebration of the mystery of the sacrament of Eucharist, complete with a monstrance, which is a vessel for the Eucharistic bread. Moreover, Des Esseintes' master's prose poems are copied in missal lettering, a script which is used for the book containing all that is said or sung during mass.

Des Esseintes's most private place, his bedroom, is made up to look like a Trappist cell (75). This is a space no one else enters,[26] for it is not the type of bedroom the young bachelor had in Paris to which female guests were admitted. At Fontenay Des Esseintes' bedroom is decorated as

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[26] A play on words in the name of the protagonist provides a curious note: Des Esseintes sounds like the French "le saint des saints," which of course means "the holy of holies."

a monastic retreat: it is "un lieu de solitude et de repos, un retrait de pensées, une espèce d'oratoire" ("a place for sleep and solitude, a setting for quiet meditation, a sort of oratory") or "une chambre en ceiluie monastique" ("facsimile of a monastery cell" (87, 88; 74, 75). He furnishes this secular monastery with "d'un petit lit de fer, un faux lit de cénobite, fabriqué avec d'anciennes ferronneries forgées et polies" ("a little iron bedstead, a mock hermit's bed, made of old wrought iron") and an antique "prie-dieu" as his bedside table (89; 75, 76). The antique kneeling bench, normally used for prayer, could hold "un vase" ("a chamber-pot") inside—a sacrilegious parody of its intended use; the top of the prie-dieu "supportait un eucologe" ("supported a euchologion")—a prayer book (89; 76).

Des Esseintes also wants to preserve the idea of a monastery from without. He lives in isolation, save for the two servants, who perform their duties unnoticeably and silently, "à un rigide silence de moines claustrés" ("inured to the absolute silence of cloistered monks") (24; 32). Moreover, Des Esseintes makes his servant woman wear the attire of the ascetic Beguines of the Netherlands of the thirteenth century, for "il voulut que son ombre, lorsqu'elle traversait les carreaux de ses fenêtres, ne fût pas hostile" ("he had no desire to see her commonplace silhouette through the window") (25; 32). As well, the

shadow of her nun-like cap gliding by "lui donnait la sensation d'un cloître, lui rappelait ces muets et dévots villages, ces quartiers morts, enfermés et enfouis dans le coin d'une active et vivante ville" ("produced an impression of convent life, and reminded him of those peaceful, pious communities, those sleepy villages shut away in some hidden corner of the busy, wide-awake city") (25; 32-33).

This habit of appropriating both the form and substance of the holy points to a surprising dynamic at work in A Rebours. Namely, as the reader progresses through A Rebours, he can sense the approach of a spiritual crisis, one which picks up speed toward the end of the book. Throughout the novel Des Esseintes is troubled by spiritual stirring. He worries about the indoctrination he received from the Jesuits as a young student, but "se rendait compte par lui-même de l'opération qu'il se figurait avoir ans résultat subie" ("he felt sure that in his case it has been without effect") (102; 86). Such reassurance disappears only shortly afterwards; when Des Esseintes "se consultait, en arrivait à se demander si les semences tombées jusqu'à ce jour dans un sol stérile, ne commençaient pas á poindre" ("examined his conscience, he began to wonder whether the seed which had fallen on apparently barren ground was not showing signs of germinating") (102; 86).

This intertextual nod to the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-13; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:1-15) identifies the

epistemic kernel of A Rebours. The "seed" is a conceit for Des Esseintes' theological and aesthetic speculations; these he describes as "c'étaient, au fond, des transports, des élans vers un idéal, vers un univers inconnu, vers une béatitude lointaine, désirable comme celle que nous promettent les Écritures" ("ardent inspirations towards an ideal, towards an unknown universe, towards a distant beatitude, as utterly desirable as that promised by the Scriptures") (106; 89). Although Huysmans later became a Trappist monk and thereby seemingly accepted Christianity, A Rebours is a work in which he is still probing, a fact that he admits in his Preface to A Rebours, written twenty years after the book's publication, where he discusses his novel from the point of view "de la Grâce, montrer quelle part d'inconnu, quelle projection d'âme qui s'ignore, il peut y avoir souvent dans un livre" ("of God's grace, [to] show how large a share the unconscious, the workings of a soul ignorant of its own tendencies, may often have in the production of a book") (xx; xlvi).[27] A case for sacramentalism could be made here: it is a term which, at the most basic level, represents the idea that sacred objects bear grace in themselves. Even an outward participation in matters holy can lead to grace due to the

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[27] Huysmans' fascination with things Catholic eventually led him to the writing of such Catholic works as En Route (1895) and La Cathédrale (1898).

holiness of the things themselves. Objects do not merely convey or symbolize God's grace, but actually have the ability to convey grace to those who use them. Symbols make up for the inadequacy of words and our own expression of the ineffable.[28]

Conclusion

According to Uitti, the Symbolist novel begins with Schopenhauer, or, more accurately, with his tenet that the world exists as representation (25). The German *Vorstellung*, aside from "representation" and "idea," also has the meaning of "imagination," "picture," and "illusion" (Collins German Dictionary). According to Schopenhauer, an individual must seek himself and the world within himself; the perception of the world is determined by the perception of the self. To quote Uitti again, he insists on "the fact that the world is seen as dependent insofar as it is "meaningful" upon

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[28] In a way, the Symbolist novel, and Symbolism, anticipated Rudolf Otto's idea of the *numinous*—that there is something that can be felt but cannot be expressed. In his book, The Idea of the Holy (1917), he writes of the human experience of "the holy," "a moment" which is distinguishable from "man's rational experience and which is in fact inexpressible." Otto coined the word *numinous* from the Latin *numen*, which means "nod" or "divinity" (Spiceland, 783). A deity or the idea of the holy can only be experienced and suggested at in words, but not reduced to an explanation; herein lies the affinity with the Symbolist novel. Spiceland explains that the "numinous cannot be taught; it can only be evoked or awakened" (783).

perceptions originating in the Self radically determined the orientation of the new novel" (38).

The Symbolist novel is thus anti-Naturalist in the way that it looks within the protagonist, who sees the world as his own representation; to the Naturalists the world appears as represented by a clinically minded observer, not looking within but documenting without. Schopenhauer, in his "Aesthetics," while ranking the arts, states that "a *novel* will be the higher and nobler the more *inner* and less *outer* life it depicts" (Essays 165). Huysmans' subjective world of his protagonists does not afford much outer life. Des Esseintes performs very few actions in A Rebours; the novel is a portrayal of his various states of mind, contemplations, and moods. Even before A Rebours, Huysmans writes in 1877 that his "fat brute of a publisher" told him that his writings "'don't prove anything, [sic] there must be action'. And he asked me the meaning of half of the words I had used" (Letter to Théodore Hannon, 20 April 1877, in Beaumont 21).

In antipathy to Naturalism, the Symbolist novel decries not only the traditional plot of action and intrigue, but also the subject matter. The nineteenth-century novel before the Symbolist novel was largely "urban, urbane and bourgeois in its origins and which was concerned chiefly with manners, marriage and money" (Reid 29). The reader had "to have a firm grasp on the narrative material," and "a course of

events that can be easily followed" (Mooij 132). Consequently, there are no actual events in A Rebours, save for the two moves, one from Paris to Fontenay, and the second possible one back. Everything that takes place is inside Des Esseintes' head; and the subjects of his inward discussions are art, religion, and fine taste from furnishings to perfumes and flowers. This interiority belongs to the *fin-de-siècle*, particularly to the forerunners of the Symbolist movement. Contrary to popular notions, however, there exists an intensity that can only be called "spiritual" in the reflexive temper of the time.

Baudelaire, during the predominantly Naturalist period, became for the Decadent generation, "the man who had raised the most fundamental question of all: what are we to do with our souls in an age that does not recognize their existence?" (Gilman 87). The High Priest of Decadence writes in his "The Salon of 1859" (Part III: The Queen of Faculties):

> In recent years we have heard it said in a thousand different ways: "Copy nature; copy only nature. There is no greater delight, no finer triumph, than an excellent copy of nature." And this doctrine, so inimical to art, was alleged to apply not only to painting but to all the arts, even to the novel, even to poetry. To these doctrinaires so satisfied with nature, an

> imaginative man would certainly have had the right to answer: "I consider it useless and tiresome to portray things as they are, because nothing that exists satisfies me. Nature is ugly, and I prefer the monsters of my imagination to the triteness of actuality. (628)

Baudelaire continues, in the same article, sounding very much like Schopenhauer: "It would have been more philosophical, however, to ask these dogmatists, first whether they are really certain of the existence of external nature" (628). The French poet expresses the idea that true nature lies within an individual, and expressing anything more or less that his own personality is a lie. What he considers to be truthful, or "the queen of truth," is imagination which has "a definite relationship with the infinite" (628).

Huysmans' opinion about art, Naturalism, and the novel is found in the first chapter of Là-Bas. In his own words, it is a summary of what he thinks about art, spoken through his protagonist Durtal (Beaumont 6). Huysmans feels that some of "the good aspects of naturalism must be retained: its documentary truthfulness, its accuracy in detail" (Beaumont 7). Zola, for his part, upon reading A Rebours, "il m'incita à rentrer dans la route frayée, à m'atteler à une étude de mœurs" ("urged [his former pupil] to return to the beaten track, . . . and write a study of manners" (Preface

xviii; xlv). But there must also be something that draws material "from the depths of the human soul." Huysmans is not willing to abandon Zola altogether but at the same time the novel must "trace another path, a parallel course in the air, a route leading to the above and beyond, a more complete form of naturalism: a spiritual naturalism" (Beaumont 7). Huysmans's work has turned out to be a different kind of novel altogether.

In writing A Rebours, "in ostensibly not conforming to a formula, Huysmans produced a new one" (Friedman, R. 35). Huysmans felt stifled by the study-of-manners novel which Zola had recommended he write; he craved "d'ouvrir les fenêtres, de fuir un milieu où j'étouffais" ("to open the windows, to escape" what had become the " moribond, usé par les redites" ("moribund, worn") and wearisome Naturalist novel (Preface xviii; xlv)). In the same vein, Huysmans writes:

> le désir qui m'appréhendait de secouer les préjugés, de briser les limites du roman, d'y faire entrer l'art, la science, l'histoire, de ne plus se servir, en un mot, de cette forme que comme d'un cadre pour y insérer de plus sérieux travaux. Moi, c'était cela qui me frappait surtout à cette époque, supprimer l'intrigue traditionelle, voire même la passion, la femme, concentrer le pinceau de lumière sur un seul

personnage, faire à tout prix du neuf. (xviii-xix)

> the desire that filled me to shake off preconceived ideas, to break the limitations of the novel, to introduce into it art, science, history; in a word not to use this form of literature except as a frame in which to put more serious kinds of work. For my part, the thing that seemed to me most indispensable at that period was to do away with the traditional plot of intrigue, even to eliminate love and woman altogether, to concentrate the ray of light on a single character, to strike out a new line at any price.
>
> (Preface xlv)

This effect has been called "partly a fantasy, partly a realistic portrait, A Rebours is an extended prose poem in which the hero reduces all other persons to objects and transforms even his visions into things, life into form" (Friedman, R. 37). Ralph Friedman sees A Rebours "as an illustration of the symbolist hero and of the method of the *fin de siècle* prose poem" (37). "De toutes les formes de la littérature, celle du poème en prose était la forme préférée de des Esseintes" ("Of all forms of literature, the prose poem was Des Esseintes' favourite"), the ideal form (264; 198). If "maniée par un alchimiste de génie, elle devait, suivant lui, renfermer, dans son petit volume, à l'état d'of

meat, la puissance du roman" ("handled by an alchemist of genius it should, he maintained, contain within its small compass and in concentrated form the substance of a novel") (264; 198). He continues, and this statement belongs to the larger task of this thesis to define and situate the Symbolist novel:

> Le roman, ainsi conçu, ainsi condensé en une page ou deux, deviendrait une communion de pensée entre un magique écrivain et un idéal lecteur, une collaboration spirituelle consentie entre dix personnes supérieures éparses dans l'univers, une délectation offerte aux délicats, accessible à eux seuls. (265)

> The novel, thus conceived, thus condensed in a page or two, would become an intellectual communion between a hieratic writer and an ideal reader, a spiritual collaboration between a dozen persons of superior intelligence scattered across the world, an aesthetic treat available to none but the most discerning (199).

The intuitive Symbolists expected "the same intuitive ability of their readership as well, and brushed aside the charges of unintelligibility raised against their works by conservative literary critics with this same appeal to intuition" (Vajda 35). Readers need intuition to follow the

"complex aesthetic procedures" which are required by a Symbolist text; otherwise, they are but "naive readers" (Karlheinz Stierle's term) of popular literature which exists to "perpetuate and produce naive readings" (Green 202). Here the reader must be an active participant in the text's formation; the reader must go beyond the simple meanings of words; the text itself cannot be read fast without pondering over words or intuited hidden meanings. A Symbolist text requires a Symbolist reader. Umberto Eco also speaks of a "good Ulysses reader" who can be extrapolated from the text itself (9-10). The text prefigures the reader, and the reader prefigures the text: "the text is nothing else but the semantic-pragmatic production of its own Model Reader" (Eco 10). Paradoxically, however, where model readers do not exist, the Symbolist movement had a programmatic impetus, albeit a very esoteric one.

Thus, on one hand, there stands an almost legendary disdain for the public reader among Symbolists; proclamations such as Huysmans': ". . . I don't give a damn about the press and the reading public" are typical (from a letter to Auguste Lauzet, 5 January 1896, in Beaumont 156). On the other hand, however, a key feature of the origination of the Symbolist novel (and any Symbolist art for that matter) "is the desire to create a new public of readers/spectators whose attitude to the new art would be diametrically opposed to the accepted norms of the

bourgeois, materialist culture" (Reynolds 195). The newly formed bourgeois class threatened to wipe out all culture, including that of the Church, through its voracious, but tasteless, appetite for money and objects. Des Esseintes refers to the bourgeois reader of the novel as "slime" ["fange"] which goes on spreading (219; 294). The providers of popular taste were numerous: two popular writers of the late nineteenth century were Pierre Zaccone and Fortuné Du Boisgobey, for example, whose works ran into many editions in the 1870s (Beaumont 246, n. 24). According to Huysmans, these and similar writers "have most certainly learnt that special language that charms the hearts of pork butchers and tripe merchants!" (Letter to Théodore Hannon, 20 April 1877, in Beaumont 21).

Nevertheless, Huysmans himself writes, through the vehicle of Des Esseintes, that "tout en désirant se dégager des préjugés, s'abstenir de toute passion, chacun va de préférence aux œuvres qui correspondent le plus intimement á son propre tempérament et finit par reléguer en arrière toutes les autres" ("however much a reader wants to rid himself of prejudice and refrain from passion, he naturally prefers those works which correspond most intimately with his own personality, and ends by relegating all the rest to limbo")(237; 180). Nearly a hundred years later, Norman Holland in his article "Unity Identity Text Self" takes this thought further by stating that "the unconscious sub-text

interacts with the sub-text (unconscious) of the reader"; moreover, "*interpretation is a function of identity*, specifically, identity conceived as variations upon an identity theme" (1980:123, qtd. in Green 193). Symbolist concerns will be best met by a reader who has an inherent Symbolist nature.

In the end, Huysmans offers one more twist on going against the grain or against the nature of the typical novel of the mid-nineteenth century. He reorganizes the role of the reader by making his hero primarily a reader. Huysmans creates his own ideal reader in Des Esseintes; the hero as reader is to be emulated. This program is one that animates the Symbolist novel. In the next chapter I examine Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray as another example of a reader as hero.

CHAPTER 3

WILDE'S PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY—AESTHETICISM AS RELIGION

> Art should never try to be popular; the public should try to make itself artistic.
> (Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man under Socialism")
>
> Art still identifies itself with all faiths for her own purposes.
> (Dante Gabriel Rossetti)
>
> With the strength of a Samson the decadent artist may pull down the pillars of the temple, though, like Samson, he is liable to crush himself in the ruin.
> (John Guest, Introduction to Oscar Wilde's Stories)
>
> It was the strangest book that he had ever read. It seemed to him that in exquisite raiment, and to the delicate sound of flutes, the sins of the world were passing in dumb show before him.
> (Dorian Gray, The Picture of Dorian Gray)
>
> A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.
> (John Keats, Book I of Endymion)

While locating the Symbolist novel in its historical context, I observed in the previous chapter that with respect to its historical placement this form was appropriately labelled "Victorian." This remark applies

appropriately labelled "Victorian." This remark applies particularly well to any discussion of Oscar Wilde (1854-1900). The extent and amount of literary and artistic material that Wilde produced in his comparatively short life stands as one of the most obvious hallmarks of his Victorian nature. Yet, unlike so many of the Victorians, Wilde wrote only one novel, but, like them, also produced poetry, fairy tales, children's literature, prose of thought, drama, autobiography, social and historical commentary, lectures, and drawings with the same kind of prolific vigour that defined the age. Moreover, as a prose stylist, Wilde's ease of expression and clarity places him alongside the likes of Thomas Carlyle, Cardinal Henry Newman, and Matthew Arnold. Wilde's notoriety as a decadent, and his connection to Symbolism, then, is a somewhat problematic one, for his literary oeuvre is uneven and, by its sheer variety, very unlike his continental Symbolist contemporaries and forebears.

By way of situating Wilde's status as a Symbolist, then, it is necessary to note that in general British Symbolism did not reach the heights of the parallel movements in France or Russia. However, as Gilman notes, "in the late eighties Huysmans, with Baudelaire, became a chief instigator of a brief cultural climate in England, called at the beginning the Aesthetic Movement but as time went on

more and more referred to as the Decadence" (108).[29] Gilman calls the British movement "thinner than its French counterpart, less passionate and ideological," but he also notes it was "marked by many of the same aspirations and by much the same confusion and cloudiness surrounding its governing idea and word" (108-9).

Wilde's only novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891), even though it presents itself as a much more conventional novel with a very typical sequential narrative plot, still it has engendered a certain "cloudiness" in its attendant criticism. A good deal of this confusion stems from the intertextual richness of the book. Charles Bernheimer finds that entire sections of Huysman's A Rebours are lifted by Wilde into Dorian Gray (61). Wilde also recycles what Bernheimer calls "witty epigrammatic dialogue" from his plays, which ultimately renders Dorian Gray "a kind of collage of artistic styles and conventions" (61). Bernheimer's use of "collage" implies a certain willingness to credit Wilde with an aesthetic more postmodern than nineteenth-century, so it is imperative to approach Dorian Gray with a reading practice that does justice to its Faustian components, to the catholicity and complexity of

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[29] Gilman's chronology is open to debate, for the Pre-Raphaelites established themselves in 1848. This aesthetic movement, while not Decadence per se, forms part of a larger British continuum that evolved into, among other things, what is properly called the Decadent period in Britain.

its aesthetic, as well as with an approach that uncovers its debt and relation to Huysmans.

The purpose of this chapter, then, lies with extending the remit of the *fin-de-siècle* Symbolist novel into nineteenth-century Britain. Although it has already been noted that the English Symbolist novel was a derivative one, it remains, nevertheless, worthy of examining in light of the governing thesis at work in the present study. Namely, that occult, neoplatonic philosophy, and heterodox Christian elements constitute the Symbolist novel, but, in so doing, they also call for a fit reader, one who is an initiate into the esoteric web present in Symbolist work. When this task is performed adequately, and such work is the goal of this chapter, it will be shown that Wilde's Dorian Gray is a notable exception to the assumption that all forms of British Decadent work are mere byproducts and therefore inferior to their continental counterparts. Put another way, the reading advanced in this chapter will re-evaluate Dorian Gray and find the novel more than worthy of the sobriquet Symbolist.

To achieve this re-evaluation, a previously unremarked element, one that forms the very structure of Dorian Gray, requires analysis. The structure is a simple one: chiasmus. However, Wilde uses this device with formidable variety, ranging from simple punning verbal formulae to the complex epistemic reciprocation between Dorian and the portrait and

the portrait and Dorian. I will say more below on the subject of chiasmus, but first, it is necessary to address the matter of the Faustian fable that undergirds Dorian Gray.

The plot of Dorian Gray is by no means original. As a writer of fairy tales himself, Wilde reaches almost instinctively, perhaps, to the story of Faust, a fourteenth-century necromancer, for his basic scheme. The folk tale was popularized by Goethe, whose Faust became "the great exemplar of the dramatization of occult experience" (Block 43). Like Goethe's work, Wilde's novel portrays the interplay between the occult and orthodox Christianity. Similar to Goethe's Faust (final text 1832), and fairy tales, Dorian Gray does not distinguish between the natural and supernatural world; both realms are traversed for experience and self-knowledge.

The specific parallels between Faust and Dorian Gray are plain to see: both Faust and Dorian gain youth. Dorian has two souls (represented by Hallward and Lord Henry), just as two souls exist in Faust: "Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach, in meiner Brust" ("Two souls, alas, are dwelling in my breast") (Faust I, l. 1112; Kaufman 145). Gretchen sings at her spinning wheel; Sibyl Vane plays in the theatre. Both male protagonists fall in love with them while the maidens (both aged seventeen) are performing. When they stop singing or playing and wish to become proper wives (both wanting to

marry out and above their class), the men lose interest in them. The difference between Gretchen and Sibyl is that Gretchen does not play at being someone else; she simply sings by herself when she is working alone. She is very much the innocent, feminine, maidenly heroine of Romantic literature, whereas Aestheticism's Sibyl is largely preoccupied with pleasing others through parody and pretense. In a melodramatic gesture, both women kill themselves after being rejected by their lovers.

The similarities go as far as the ridiculous: both Gretchen and Sibyl Vane have rough, but ineffectual, soldier or sailor brothers who attempt to defend their sister's honour, only to perish themselves. Both Faust and Dorian suffer immensely upon hearing about the deaths of their lovers, but not for long; Mephistopheles and Lord Henry remind them about the experiences not had yet.

On the surface of things, it might appear that Wilde does not follow Goethe's version of Faust, where Faust is not damned in the end, but Marlowe's. Wilde seems to return instead to the sixteenth-century German chapbook tradition which recites a black-and-white tale of Faust's eternal punishment for pursuing the pleasures of the senses and prying into secret knowledge. The Mephistophelean figure of Dorian Gray does not lead the protagonist to a higher good but to death, physical and spiritual. Goethe's devil is an instrument of God; Mephistopheles is "Ein Teil von jener

Kraft, / Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft" ("Part of that force which would/ Do evil evermore, and yet creates the good") (Faust I, ll. 1335-36; Kaufman 159). However, to venture into the fabular background takes Wilde's reader into the perilous and unfruitful realm of examining the role and nature of each person in the book.

Any adequate reading of Dorian Gray as a Symbolist novel, rather, must first sidestep the temptation to treat the book through character analysis. That is, to debate the adequacy of representation at work in Basil Hallward, Lord Henry Wotton, or Dorian Gray avails little, for this move, even when it gains force by evincing the intertextual and allegorical complexities of the Faustian or Ovidian nature of the book runs the risk of finding Wilde's novel a poor one because so little depth or verisimilitude can be found in its characters. To focus on the book's characters is, in effect, a reception study that extends to commentary on the morality, or lack thereof, found in Dorian Gray.

Michael Gillespie observes both the predictability and inadequacy of such criticism when he notes that "a survey of recent studies underscores a sense that the conservative intellectual tendencies that informed the earliest responses to Wilde have changed only marginally over the past one hundred years" (7). To avoid this "atavistic inclination" Gillespie offers a "resistant" reading of Dorian Gray that foregrounds the discursive indeterminacy of the book (7).

Although Gillespie's work is subtle, he engages in his own version of atavism when he finds narrative ambiguity, which amounts to a New Critical conclusion, the unyielding and, therefore, the redeeming element of Wilde's novel.

Gillespie, however, highlights the importance of reading around the obvious and the conventional in Dorian Gray. A good example of this need arises where Wilde works an Ovidian gesture into Dorian Gray by making his titular character resemble Narcissus. Although Dorian can hardly be called an overdetermined character in terms of any archetypal or intertextual complexity, he becomes, to some degree, a composite figure. However, where Dorian might seem to some degree innocent of the bargain he strikes to avoid his "first wrinkle," he is no less wilful and intentional than Faust when he says that "I would give my soul" to be "always young"(21). At a simple readerly level, Wilde's challenge in unfolding the character of Dorian resides in his ability to make his audience accept the Narcissistic innocence of Dorian, while, at the same time, underlining the Faustian wilfulness in his vow. The reception of Dorian Gray, whether the novel is accepted and critiqued as either meaningful or dissipated, depends almost entirely on which aspect of Dorian's character the reader attenuates, that is, the Narcissistic or Faustian element.

To move beyond this dilemma with its either/or fallacy, a generical hermeneutic that places Dorian Gray into a

Symbolist paradigm is a particularly useful way of reading below the surface of the novel. This approach exposes the philosophical and aesthetic elements of Dorian Gray by arguing that Wilde's novel hinges on a chiastic structure that creates a paradigm where life becomes art and art becomes life. By shifting the interpretive focus to the matter of genre, it becomes possible to admit that there is a discomfiting quality to Dorian Gray. On one hand, not one of the book's characters merits serious analysis for they are little but types, and, on the other hand, the novel is a compelling one. In effect, Dorian Gray forces its reader to ask why such a seemingly bad book is so interesting to read. The answer lies with the significance of the issues the book treats—art becoming life, life becoming art. In this regard, Wilde's novel has a parabolic quality to it. Wilde frequently used the parabolic form, as is shown in his children's stories such as "The Selfish Giant," so to identify Dorian Gray as an extended parable is not an unexpected conclusion. Indeed, the ease with which the plot of Dorian Gray can be reduced to a parable—"once there was a beautiful young man who. . ."—indicates that there is a didactic quality to Wilde's putatively anti-instrumental work. G. Wilson Knight calls the novel "an extended parable,' while Pearce echoes him with his own observation that "the plot unfurls like a parable, illuminating the grave spiritual dangers involved in a life of immoral action

and experiment" (229; 164). Lord Henry, towards the end of the novel, paraphrases the words of the Gospel in Mark 8:36: "'what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose—how does the quotation run?—his own soul'?" (176). In this regard, Dorian Gray belongs to the same generical register as Huysmans' A Rebours in that both books function as a kind of secular scripture. In Wilde's case, Dorian Gray possesses a canonical function in that it works ultimately to substitute art for religion, or in terms more consonant with Wilde's heterodox and humanist Christianity, it redirects faith from the Creator (the transcendent Christian God) to the creator (the bathymetric symbolist artist).

Like Huysmans, Wilde's symbolist work creates epistemic uncertainty by mixing the supernatural and natural unproblematically in order to facilitate this redirection of faith. Wilde creates a deeper level of argument, however, by mobilizing a set of aesthetic ideas that appear, at first blush, to be contradictory. Much of what characterizes Wilde's approach to aesthetics can be traced to his Oxford professors, John Ruskin and Walter Pater.[30] Indeed, Gilman

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[30] From Wilde's correspondence it is implicit that he did give some thought to Schopenhauer, mostly evident through discussions with his mother when he was twenty-two. As with Huysmans, "Schopenhauer would come to rival Christ"' but, to his mother's disappointment, in the end, Wilde's turned out to be only a passing interest in the German philosopher and Catholicism became the "antidote to Schopenhauer" (Pearce 47). Schopenhauer's elevation of art and its impracticality in the real world recalls Wilde's own statement of art being quite useless (Pearce 48; Wilde,

argues that "Ruskin's sermons about the high importance of art and its superiority to bourgeois values fused with the stress that Pater . . . had placed on need for new experience" to shape the imagination of Wilde and his generation (120).

Unquestionably Ruskin had little sympathy for the ideas of Pater, but this antipathy had little effect on Wilde who absorbed first the ideas of Ruskin then, in time, those of Pater. It is important to note that there is no evidence, at least in Dorian Gray, that Wilde substituted Pater's outlook for Ruskin's. Rather, both men played a role in the formation of Wilde's aesthetic outlook, even if that role appears contrary to either thinker's work.

In Ruskin's mythologization of the medieval sensibility, one that "realized its particular nature most fully through the arts" (Gilman 120), can be seen Wilde's nearly antagonistic moral sense of art. Thus, even though he lost his enthusiasm for Ruskin's vision of art as moral and useful to English society (Pearce 34-35)several years after he first heard Ruskin's lectures at Oxford in 1874, Wilde appears tinged by this viewpoint when he makes Dorian Gray the victim of his own hedonism. Indeed, despite the fact that Dorian Gray earned much disapprobation from its reading public, much of the book's force stems from the moral fable that it unfolds.

Preface to Dorian Gray).

Alongside, indeed leading up to, the final retribution that occurs in Dorian Gray lies Pater's seemingly amoral approach to art's role in culture. Often considered the father of Aestheticism, or as Wilde called him, "a "Presbyterian Verlaine" (Gilman 118), Pater exerts a considerable influence within Dorian Gray. At the very beginning of the novel, Dorian Gray is seduced by Lord Henry's "Pateresque sermons" (Pearce 37). "Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations" proclaims Lord Henry, reminiscent of Pater's words from the "Conclusion" of his Studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873)(18). Wilde, through Lord Henry, writes of living for the moment, especially in youth, before "we degenerate into hideous puppets, haunted by the memory of the passions of which we were too much afraid, and the exquisite temptations that we had not the courage to yield to" (19). Pater's words on the need for spontaneity and experience are worth citing at length:

> . . . some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive for us—for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end. . . . How can we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their

> purest energy?
>
> To burn always with this hard gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. Failure is to form habits; for habit is relative to a stereotyped world; meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike. (645)

Wilde's appropriation of Pater's philosophy may appear to explain the ending of Dorian Gray. In living out Pater's maxims, Dorian's life ends in murder and suicide. However, even though Wilde came to refute the philosophy of Pater as well, it is more than likely that some part of Ruskin's moral philosophy of art lived on in Wilde's imagination. The likelihood that the ideas of Ruskin and Pater functioned as an amalgam in Dorian Gray is strong, for when put together, the ideas encourage the kind of aesthetic delving at work in the novel, one that puts life in art and art into life.[31]

As indicated earlier, however, the aesthetic inquiry

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[31] Pater provided his own counterpart to the French Des Esseintes—Marius, of Marius the Epicurean, published a year after A Rebours. Marius is also a representative decadent, "attracted to a series of cults like a series of sensations," experimenting with something Pater calls "new Cyrenaicism and early Christianity" (Ellmann, "The Uses of Decadence, 29). Marius, as Des Esseintes before him, and Dorian Gray after him, seeks extraordinary exotic experiences which feed the spiritual side of being. As Ellmann illustrates in the same essay, while Marius is set historically during the reign of Marcus Aurelius in the second century, Wilde, with his The Picture of Dorian Gray, provides for "a more modern and English instance" of decadence (29).

mounted by Wilde also has what is best called an ontological element in that Basil Hallward renders the person of Dorian Gray into the portrait—life becoming art. Dorian Gray, once possessed of the "new Hedonism," renders his life into art. Although there is a perilous tidiness to such representations, it is possible to conceive of this situation in a schematic way. Wilde quite literally "places crosswise," that is, he uses chiasmus to move Dorian Gray from a realist, mimetic mode of representation in the portrait into a Symbolist non-mimetic mode of representation. The animating force in this dynamic stems from Dorian's vow—"I would give my soul"—to be "always young" (21). In effect, this occult topos, that of immortality or eternal youth, provides Wilde with the permission to explore not so much Decadence as a moral position, but, rather, a complex set of conceptual correspondences treating decadence as a set of aesthetics. Although these correspondences often present themselves as binaries, in Wildean aesthetics they are, in fact, continua that permit examination of a cluster of categories.

The items examined include Basil Hallward's garden in relation to London's seamier locales; the portrait in relation to Dorian Gray; the intellect in relation to the body; the soul in relation to the body; the moral in relation to the amoral; the "monstrous" in relation to the civil; the visible in relation to the invisible; youth in

relation to age; beauty in relation to ugliness; "Prince Charming" in relation to the hedonistic Dorian Gray; the artificial in relation to the genuine; the portrait in relation to a mirror; self-development in relation to self-absorption; the self in relation to the representation of self; the decadent Dandy in relation to the Victorian Gentleman; the "nineteenth century" in relation to the past and future; and art in relation to the artist. This list is by no means exhaustive, yet it constellates the main freight of Dorian Gray in that it places on view the Symbolist agenda at work in the book. Moreover, this list displays Wilde's ability to create a philosophically challenging text, one consistent with the intellectual and artistic rigour he possessed, one that shows the inadequacy of evaluating Dorian Gray on the basis of its characters and their morals.

To examine the conceptual correspondences in Dorian Gray, it is necessary to consider the role of the portrait in the narrative, for it lies at the nexus of the chiastic structure that comprises the novel.[32] Basil Hallward's portrait of Dorian Gray condenses the occult element of the

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[32] Ed Cohen remarks that Dorian Gray is "born of a conjunction between Basil's visual embodiment of his erotic desire for Dorian and Lord Henry's verbal sublimation of such desire" (9). Bernheimer says that the creation of Dorian Gray occurs at the "intersection of verbal and visual representations" (59). Both Cohen and Bernheimer approach, but do not name, chiasmus in their respective uses of "conjunction" and "intersection."

novel because it causes a nearly tectonic shift in epistemic registers when it enters the narrative. Part of the portrait's power lies in Wilde's absorption of Goethe's Faust because it did not distinguish between the natural and supernatural world. As noted earlier, like Goethe's Faust, Wilde's Dorian Gray allows its titular character to traverse both the natural and the supernatural realms for experience and self-knowledge. Wilde, however, does not rigidly follow Faust; rather he places his emphasis on the supernatural quality not of a demonic plot character but on the occult power of the portrait. Its role cannot be understated because no matter how strenuously or subtly one argues that Lord Henry Wotton functions as an archetypal Mephistopheles who corrupts the young Dorian, it is impossible to overlook the fact that Wotton is nearly altogether ignorant of the portrait's power. Lord Henry's influence on Dorian is undeniable, but it must also be remembered that his suasion is secondary to the "yellow" and "poisonous" book that had so powerful an effect on Dorian (102-03). Moreover, Lord Henry can hardly be viewed as a Mephistophelean *animateur* in the instance where he dismisses Dorian when he confesses to Hallward's murder. Dorian's question, "'What would you say, Harry, if I told you that I had murdered Basil?'" is met with Lord Henry's typical self-absorption:

> 'I would say, my dear fellow, that you were posing for a character that doesn't suit you. All crime

> is vulgar, just as all vulgarity is crime. It is not in you, Dorian, to commit a murder. I am sorry if I hurt your vanity by saying so, but I assure you that it is not true. Crime belongs to the lower orders. I don't blame them in the smallest degree. I should fancy that crime was to them what art is to us, simply a method of procuring extraordinary sensations'. (175)

It is conceivable that Lord Henry's comments are to be viewed as ironic, but they are entirely consistent with his habit of defending the accuracy, and perforce, the shallowness, of his perceptions. In other words, Lord Henry truly believes that no matter what his influence may be over Dorian, his initial view that however much he might "dominate" him (30), Dorian would still possess the "white purity of boyhood" (29). Indeed, there exists in Lord Henry's disregard of the factualness of Dorian's confession a form of dramatic irony designed to expose his wilful blindness to anything that cannot be contained by his epigrammatic formulas, in this case, "all crime is vulgar, just as all vulgarity is crime" (175). Put another way, Lord Henry's pride makes it inconceivable that any work of his hand—that is, Dorian,—might be "vulgar."

In terms of its occult power, the portrait, then, escapes Lord Henry's purview, so its role in the narrative becomes all the more crucial. The power of the portrait is

both logical and semantic. In verbal formulae like Lord Henry's "crime is vulgar, and vulgarity is crime" a problematic relationship between similarities and differences arises. This situation leads to a degree of conceptual, and possibly, even a degree of moral chaos. By "placing crosswise" or inverting syntactical and conceptual correspondences, in Dorian Gray Wilde brings into existence necessary antithetical complements. Once brought into existence, inversion is further used to remind the reader that either half of the created duality has an equal claim on the reader, and, in particular, in Dorian Gray, either half has an equal claim with respect to its ontological status.

The inverted or reciprocating concepts are properly termed chiasmus. A chiasmus is usually made up of two halves which are each other's mirror. The two halves are perceived to be in opposition to one another, but the net effect is to suggest alternatives; both options of any chiasmus should be equally plausible. Wilde's penchant for chiastic structures may stem from his knowledge of Shakespeare, in particular Macbeth, where "Fair is foul and foul is fair."

Numerous examples of chiastic structure abound in Dorian Gray. Many of these are not verbal, but, rather, conceptual. Considered from a chiastic perspective, Sibyl Vane is an actor, and the reversal of love's expectations occurs through a simple conceptual chiasmus. That is, as an

actress, she plays when she works, and works when she plays. Whether Wilde intentionally embroidered Dorian Gray with this tidy formula when he introduced Sibyl Vane into the story is a moot point. Rather, the uncanny way in which this chiastic structure works to further Wilde's preoccupation with interrogating the purpose, means, and nature of art, mimesis, and representation is too similar to the overall structure of the novel to be left unremarked. Lord Henry's comment just prior to going with Hallward and Dorian to see Sibyl displays Wilde's symbolist agenda in reversing the conventional relationship in mimesis: "'I love acting. It is so much more real than life'"(65). Sibyl's confession of insight to Dorian, which is an ironic bit of sagacity in the book's setting, is one more chiastic relationship: "'before I knew you, acting was the one reality of my life. . . . You had brought me something higher, something of which all art is but a reflection. . . . I have grown sick of the shadows'" 69-71). This realization signals that Sibyl is crossing from art to life, but as she fails to anchor herself in art, in acting, she effectively passes out of Dorian's realm where art is life.

The purpose of chiasmus is frequently supposed to lie in its oppositional power (Norrman 6); however, it simultaneously diagrams both opposition and reciprocity, as in the pattern AB:BA. This pattern animates the novel. Indeed, Wilde builds the novel around the pattern of Dorian-

picture:picture-Dorian. Nearly from the outset of the narrative, Wilde makes the reciprocal relationship between the two Dorians the enduring riddle of the novel. The overall effect of these chiastic structures serves what, for the purpose of this study, can be called Wilde's Symbolist agenda: he breaks down the barriers between art and artist, life and art, reality and representation, as well as between the subject and object.

To return to the function of chiasmus and the portrait in Dorian Gray, a clear purpose and effect can be identified in the relation of these two items. The purpose of all chiastic structures in Dorian Gray lies with their ability to juxtapose the similarities and differences in the reader's conception of the relationship between the artist in relation to art, or, more succinctly, the subject in relation to the object.

With respect to Hallward and Dorian's portrait, chiasmus enables Wilde to put a subtle structure of desire into the book's fabric. This structure is a deep one that evokes Aristophane's myth of human sexual origins. He describes the original form of the human as being "a rounded whole, with double back and flanks forming a complete circle; it had four hands and an equal number of legs, and two identically similar faces upon a circular neck . . . it had two organs of generation" (Cantarella 58). Depending on the two sexes with which each human being was equipped,

humanity was divided into three species: men, who had two male organs; women, who had two female organs; and hermaphrodites, who had one male and one female organ. One day Zeus decided to punish these beings for their arrogance, and he split each of them in half, creating humanity as it is known today. Homosexual men find their origins in the entirely male being, while lesbians come from the entirely female being. Heterosexuals then, derive from the hermaphrodite (Cantarella 58). In this understanding, homosexuality is not transgressive in the least, but, rather, in its desire for the same sex it constitutes a primal drive to recapture the ontological wholeness and homology of man's original and complete state. With this mythic background in mind, when Hallward says, very early in the novel, "It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself"(4), he creates a perspectival shift that prompts the reader to attend less to the titular object-The Picture of Dorian Gray-and more to Hallward, the artist. In this sense, Wilde manages to create a supreme piece of misdirection for his audience, for the novel, in this sense, is really not about Dorian Gray or his portrait. A kind of Symbolist wit is at work here because the fitness of the reader is being judged by the book's cover, which, in effect, challenges the reader to be clear about the subject of the work. Tongue in cheek, Wilde appropriates the old

chestnut about not judging books by their covers for his own agenda, one that addresses only an inner circle of readers. Hallward, in painting Dorian reveals himself, and thus displays a degree of anxiety over becoming the book's subject, or, at least, the subject placed on view for the symbolist reader: "The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul" (4).

Hallward's reluctance to reveal his soul recalls Lord Henry's echo of Pater's observation that "'Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul'" (17). Lord Henry repeats this line a second time on the same page to add emphasis to the relation of the senses to the soul. This chiastic arrangement of senses to soul and soul to senses is crucial to Wilde's Dorian Gray because it refers both to an Aesthetic or Symbolist urge to fill the "senses" with a meaning that foregrounds their capacity for perception and appreciation of beauty, or of feeling or sensibility in matters of taste. To do so, however, is problematic within the Symbolist program because it places the senses on an instrumentalist plane so that they become useful. That is, taken in this way, Lord Henry comes uncharacteristically close to a kind of earnestness that is altogether foreign to him. Because the context of the chiastic approximation of the senses to the soul is one of art, specifically painting, Wilde appears

to straddle the Aesthetic fence by suggesting, perhaps inadvertently, that art has a social function even though the official program of the movement was to argue that art's value, if there was one, was intrinsic. If Lord Henry's words are meant as a deliberate echo of Pater, then Wilde appears to partake in a kind of artistic complicity that is comparable to the one evinced by contemporary deconstructionism when it is forced to use language to communicate the message of language's inadequacy and non-referentiality.

To read Lord Henry's words as an unintentional admission of art's usefulness, however, overlooks the polysemy of the word "senses." The word also refers to the faculties of corporeal sensation construed as channels for gratifying the desire for pleasure and lusts of the flesh. This meaning appears wholly suited to the Lord Henry of the Mephistophelean stripe that is typically awarded him. However, by virtue of the chiastic structure present elsewhere in the book and here in this particular arrangement——"nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul"——Wilde achieves a reciprocity between the soul and the senses. Read in this way, Hallward's desire to never reveal his "soul," that is, to closet his painting of Dorian Gray, becomes more a moment of homoerotic secrecy, for the painting (at least to Hallward) so plainly displays a sensuality of soul that is

sexually transgressive to Victorian Britain in its admission that the subject desires his object—Dorian.

Although it is possible to become embroiled in the lively gender and sexual practice debate that attends Wilde's sodomy trial, it is possible to read Hallward's relationship to Dorian and his portrait in a way that accords with the larger role of chiasmus in Dorian Gray. Namely, Wilde uses chiasmus to create a structure of desire between Hallward and the portrait, its subject, and between the portrait and its subject. This structure, of course, collapses when Dorian murders Hallward, but it raises the possibility that Hallward's self consciousness of his desire is not so much a figuration of a sexualized homosexuality, but, rather, an example of what Christopher Craft calls the "recuperational homosexual desire to restore pre-schismatic unity" (88). Craft's reference to "unity" evokes Aristophanes' myth of sexual origins, and Wilde's words take on new meaning. They thus become less about homosexuality, albeit a sublimated, covert, or closeted one, and more about a drive to heal the soul through the senses. The medium of healing is, of course, art, more specifically the portrait's ability to figure forth the ideal missing half of a complete union.

When the relationship between Hallward, Dorian and the portrait is understood as a deeper formation of mythic desire, his words take on new meaning when he says, "'If

only it were the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old!'" (21). Dorian's wish to have things "the other way" refers not only to reversing positions with the painting but also to reversing temporal positions to achieve immortality, or, according to Aristophanes, a primordial state.

Dorian's fascination with beauty, then, must be seen as more than superficial vanity:

> 'I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die. I am jealous of the portrait you have painted of me. Why should it keep what I must lose? Every moment that passes takes something from me, and gives something to it. Oh, if it were only the other way! If the picture could change, and I could be always what I am now!' (22)

This iteration of Dorian's wish to reverse roles with the painting intensifies Wilde's point, and effectively confirms that the object of this pattern of repetition staged within the larger thematic relationship between Dorian and his portrait lies with removing the distinction between person and picture.[33] Lord Henry signals that the chiastic

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[33] Michael Rothberg writes about Poe's "Oval Portrait" and the "paradox which the story embodies . . . that the perfect portrait destroys (the individuality of) its object" (4). Interesting parallels can be drawn between portraits, identities, and losses of individuality in Poe's and Wilde's works. Again, I am grateful to professor Milan Dimic for these intimations.

translation has taken effect when he asks Hallward, "'Before which Dorian? The one who is pouring tea for us, or the one in the picture?'" (24).

This remark is crucial, for, on one hand, it shows that Hallward will stay with the real Dorian, which reinforces the implication that Hallward desires him. On the other hand, Lord Henry ceases to differentiate between the portrait and the person; indeed, Lord Henry never marshals his discernment to distinguish between the portrait's purity and Dorian's decadence.

For his part, Dorian reveals a fundamental confusion when he asks, "Am I really like that?" (24). It would be too much to say that Wilde anticipated contemporary debates on agency and subjectivity, yet he clearly interrogates the nature of identity with the two versions of Dorian Gray that fill the book. Even to say that Wilde interrogates, is to substitute a modern euphemism for what might be better called boredom; that is, Dorian Gray, by making central the representation of the self, probes the problem of self representation inadvertently, by refusing to take seriously the idea of a unitary self.

This reading might appear strained if it were not for several of Lord Henry's musings:

> 'To note the curious hard logic of passion, and the emotional coloured life of the intellect—to observe where they met, and where they separated,

> at what point they were in unison, and at what point they were at discord—there was a delight in that!' (47)

By conflating passion with logic and intellect with emotion, Wilde effectively extends his insinuation that wholeness defies conventional separations of emotion from logic. Lord Henry continues in the same vein, but this time overtly mouths one of Wilde's chiastic constructions:

> 'Soul and body, body and soul—how mysterious they were! There was animalism in the soul, and the body had its moments of spirituality. The senses could refine and the intellect could degrade. Who could say where the fleshly impulse ceased, or the psychical impulse began? How shallow were the arbitrary definitions of ordinary psychologists!' (47)

In this case, "soul and body, body and soul," Wilde places on view how troublesome and limiting "arbitrary definitions" become when one takes very seriously the nature of human existence and human desire.

Wilde's use of chiasmus extends so as to advance to another node at the conceptual centre of Dorian Gray: the role of art in religion and religion as art. To be more specific, Wilde was interested less in the ceremony and structure of religion or art, and more in their spirit because both represented to him a means to a higher plane.

In this regard, Wilde would almost certainly agree with Colin Wilson's definition of occultism as "not an attempt to draw aside the veil of the unknown, but simply the veil of banality that we call the present" (Occult 171). In order to proceed past that "veil"—to the Symbolist centre of the book, it is necessary first to examine the role of Huysman's A Rebours in Wilde's own reading and then within Dorian Gray.

If, in the 1870s, Wilde had been greatly influenced by Pater's Studies in the History of the Renaissance, then in the 1880s it was Huysmans' A Rebours. This book had become Wilde's "Bible and bedside book" (Ellmann, Oscar 252). Dorian Gray is often linked with A Rebours in terms of intertextual relations and as an equal or counterpart to the French decadent novel. Wilde considered A Rebours "as the gospel of a fascinatingly wicked religion" (Winwar 157). He read the book while in Paris in the summer of 1884, two weeks after it was published. Wilde appears to transfer his veneration for Huysman's novel to his protagonist, for he makes Dorian prize A Rebours as Des Esseintes did his favourite text—Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du mal. Dorian orders nine copies of the first edition and has them bound in different colours, "so that they might suit his various moods and the changing fancies" (104).

The eleventh chapter of Dorian Gray is especially indebted to A Rebours; like Des Esseintes before him, Dorian

studies jewels, perfumes, and Catholicism. Although the narrative unfolds for ten chapters before Dorian has read "the yellow book" which Lord Henry had given to him, it assumes a major role in the larger story.[34] The young protagonist comes to see Huysmans' novel as "the story of his own life, written before he had lived it" and Des Esseintes as "a kind of prefiguring type of himself" (104).

Dorian's living quarters, like Des Esseintes, are laid out in "subtle symphonic arrangements of exotic flowers, and embroidered cloths" (105). Dorian reads Petronius' Satyricon to which Huysmans devotes nearly all of chapter three of A Rebours. Dorian dresses the dandy, according to Des Esseintes' instructions, albeit foppishly and half-seriously (106). He also becomes an aromatherapist of sorts; Dorian seeks to "elaborate a real psychology of perfumes" (109). More important, for the purposes of my thesis here, are the convergences between Des Esseintes' and Dorian's interest in things ritual, occult, and religious.

Ecclesiastical vestments and sacred objects occupy a special place of reverence in Dorian's house, for Des Esseintes and Dorian have both had lonely boyhoods. Both contemplate thoughts of being the last of their kin as they

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[34] Gilman explains: "the "Yellow Nineties," which make up the English counterpart of the *fin de siècle* in France, were given the provocative name through a chance circumstance: the exotic French novels that had begun to have a vogue in London during the previous decade happened to have been bound mostly in that color" (114-15).

contemplate the portraits of their ancestors "whose blood flowed in [their] veins" (117). To escape this loneliness Dorian, as did Des Esseintes before him, finds comfort in not only the possession of sacred objects but also what they represent. Dorian "had a special passion . . . for ecclesiastical vestments, as indeed he had for everything connected with the service of the Church" (114). He possessed "the raiment of the Bride of Christ," fashioned by fifteenth-century Italian craftsmen; chasubles, "figured with representations of the Passion and Crucifixion of Christ"; "dalmatics of white satin and pink silk damask"; "altar frontals"; "and many corporals, chalice-veils, and sudaria" (114-15). Indeed, the collection would have met with Des Esseintes' fastidious approval if not envy.

This collection of sacred material is more than mere acquisitiveness on Dorian's part; rather, it constitutes a commitment to the sacramental nature of art. Sacramentalism, or the ability of sacred objects to inspire faith all on their own, thus comes to play a key role in Dorian Gray. If only to escape his loneliness, which resulted in part "with that pride of individualism," Dorian finds that the lovely sacred objects became to him "means of forgetfulness, models by which he could escape . . . from the fear that seemed to him at times to be almost too great to be borne" (115). The ostensive purpose of collecting, then, is to shield Dorian from his fear of divine retribution, due for his morally

dissipated life. Wilde, however, makes Dorian's sacramentalist urges assume a larger purpose.

This purpose is best seen by examining a representative piece of criticism, albeit one that is representatively astray, on the topic. Felski comments on both A Rebours and Dorian Gray:

> the fascination with the trappings of religious ritual reflects a deeper allegiance to a Christian conception of nature as fundamentally base and corrupt, with art now taking on the sublimating function previously ascribed to religion (1102).

While I agree that Symbolist art had come to replace religion, Felski here shows a profound misunderstanding of both Roman Catholic and Protestant theology concerning the fundamental essence of nature and creation as "very good" (Genesis 1:31) by virtue of Divine fiat and proclamation. Indeed, no extreme of Christian theology, be it Augustinian, Calvinist, Arminian, humanist, or Wesleyan has ever departed from the idea that all creation, no matter what consequence was wrought by the Adamic fall, remains the work of a benevolent and good Creator. Inasmuch as Felski's comments betray a dichotomy between the spirit and nature, with the latter being "base and corrupt," then she aligns herself more in the Manichean or Gnostic tradition. Wilde, of course, through his own explorations of Catholicism and his exposure to the Christian thought of both Ruskin and Pater

conceived of the material world, both in its natural and in man-made art as good. Historically and culturally, however, he participated in the aesthetical agendas of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Decadents, so Wilde emphasized art over nature, but never to the point where nature was conceived as "corrupt." More to the point, Felski runs the risk of confusing nature with naturalism, which was an aesthetic that Wilde did wish to supplant. Wilde himself writes to the editor of the St. James's Gazette on 26 of June, 1890: "The function of the artist is to invent, not to chronicle. . . . Life by its realism is always spoiling the subject-matter of art. The supreme pleasure in literature is to realise the non-existent" (Holland 430).

Wilde, in his essay "The Decay of Lying," relegates Realism to "bad art":

> All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals. Life and Nature may sometimes be used as part of Art's rough material, but before they are of any real service to Art they must be translated into artistic conventions. The moment Art surrenders its imaginative medium it surrenders everything. As a method Realism is a complete failure . . . . (De Profundis and Other 86)

This distinction between nature and Realism is crucial to any substantive reading of Dorian Gray because without it

the presence of sacramental objects becomes either empty fetishism or slavish emulation of Huysmans. Read for their basic Christian purpose, sacraments serve as either a sign or symbol of God's real presence, as in Protestantism, or through Roman Catholicism's appropriation of Aristotelian metaphysics, where the very essence of God, the role of holy objects must be seen, especially in Wilde's case, as kind of translational object. That is, Wilde appropriates the sacramental not as a sign of or presence of the divine, but as a representation of art's holiness. Put another way, the art and craftsmanship in the service of church undergoes a chiastic transformation to become not mere vehicles, but, rather, divine in themselves. The picture of Dorian Gray and its reciprocating role as person-portrait or portrait-person thematizes the concatenation of art signifying the divine and art becoming divine at work in Wilde's novel.

In an appropriate emulation of Holy Scripture, Dorian Gray is, on one the hand, a simple tale, but, on the other hand, it is rich in metaphor, parable, aphorism, paradox, inversion, intertextuality, and chiasm. Yet, despite its richness Weir writes that "Dorian Gray . . . belong[s] permanently to the fin de siècle because in [it]. . . decadence becomes something stable and identifiable." For Weir, Wilde and his contemporaries "do not write with decadence behind them, . . but in front of them: it is there to observe and describe, a known quantity with identifiable

characteristics"(102-3). Weir continues: "This novel, therefore, has little to say to later writers: romantic characterization, epigrammatic style, and conventional structure are not the stuff of modernism" (115). This curiously restrictive assessment means to confine Dorian Gray to a small niche in history and in literary significance.

Despite Weir's limiting critical gesture, Dorian Gray is more than a secondary or even tertiary manifestation of continental Symbolism. Equally true, the book is more than characterization, style, or structure, at least in the terms that Weir conceives. When the chiastic quality of Wilde's characters, style, and structure are considered, Dorian Gray becomes a book of real impact, first on its reader, then, perforce on literary history. In Wilde's hands, chiasmus becomes the equivalent of a verbal or linguistic mirror where one phrase and idea mirrors its complement. Conceived of as an AB:BA structure, the nodal point—what Norrman calls ambilateralism (7)—breaks down conventional left to right syntax and logic. In effect, the reader ceases reading words that place soul-body:body-soul in apposition. Instead, the reader gazes at them, rather like as at a portrait, to solve their puzzle. The puzzle gains intricacy by virtue of the structure's reciprocity, for example in crime-vulgarity:vulgarity-crime. As the concepts stare back at the reader, they simultaneously suggest a homology of meaning

that destabilizes conventional knowledge, and they thus adumbrate the limits of such knowledge.

Wilde's wit allows him to achieve the same effect through other means, as this exchange between Lady Monmouth and Lord Henry shows:

> 'I believe in the [English] race,' she cried.
>
> 'It represents the survival of the pushing.'
>
> 'It has development.'
>
> 'Decay fascinates me more.'
>
> 'What is Art?' she asked.
>
> 'It is a malady.'
>
> 'Love?'
>
> 'An illusion.'
>
> 'Religion?'
>
> 'The fashionable substitute for Belief.'
>
> 'You are a sceptic.'
>
> 'Never! Scepticism is the beginning of Faith.'
>
> 'What are you?'
>
> 'To define is to limit.' (160-61)

Lord Henry's comment, "to define is to limit," recalls Mallarmé's dictum: "to name is to destroy," mentioned in the previous chapter. This exchange reads like a Symbolist manifesto, but more to the point, it sums up the force of Dorian Gray: human desire—for beauty, for youth, for freedom, for wholeness, for what is forbidden. These are the stuff of great novels and great art, which finally explains

the strange enduring power—its magic—of this simple fabular text.

CHAPTER 4

BELY'S PETERSBURG—ANTHROPOSOPHIC SCRIPTURE

> The disease . . . seized me. . . . Suddenly, the sufferings in the novels of Huysmans . . . overtook me.
> (Andrei Bely, Notes of an Eccentric)

> Regarding the desire to respond to the tastes and demands of the majority of the reading public at the present time: This [desire] is especially harmful and destroys ahead of time all the significance of what is being written. The significance of all literary creations consists only in that they are didactic in the figurative sense, like a sermon, but that they disclose something new to the people, something hitherto unknown to them, and in great part in opposition to what is perceived as unquestionable by the greater public.
> (Leo Tolstoy in a letter to Leonid Andreev)

> "Who will read it? Who needs it?"
> (Andrei Bely in the Preface to his Fourth Symphony)

> Anthroposophy is a way of knowledge which leads the Spirit in man to the Spirit of the Universe.
> (Rudolf Steiner)

> 'What is truth?'
> (Petersburg 45)

The Symbolist period in Russian literature is commonly

referred to as the Silver Age;[35] the allusion echoes back to the Latin Decadence, also called part of the Silver Age, with Petronius as its chief representative and favourite of Huysmans. By far the best representative of Russia's Silver Age is Andrei Bely (pseudonym for Boris Bugaev, 1880-1934); he is the quintessential Symbolist poet, novelist, essayist, theorist, and a great example of an artist living his life as art. Bely's prolific output was partly inspired by, and a response to, Western European thinkers. These included the writers Huysmans and Wilde, and, philosophers, chiefly German, from Schopenhauer to the neo-Kantians, such as Heinrich Rickert. Most important, however, was his personal contact with the occult philosopher Rudolf Steiner.[36] For Bely and the Russian Symbolists who followed the German philosophers,

> the symbolist method was that of artistic perception, reaching the essence of things and representing the unknown by symbols. The

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[35] The Silver Age in Russian literature, another *fin-de-siècle* period lasting into the 1920s, is comprised of several movements, of which Symbolism was only a part. Other *-isms* include Acmeism and Futurism. The Silver Age as a whole ushered in a new era of radical and experimental changes in poetry and prose. Broadly, the literary movements would fit under the rubric of Modernism.

[36] Today Steiner is perhaps better known for his Waldorf Schools, found all over the world, than the personal spiritual leader that he was to Bely and other artists who lived with the artists' colony in Dornach, Switzerland.

> centre of gravity is in reaching the unreachable, in transformation of art into a religion of life. The height of symbolism is in the unification of creative art with religion, in theurgy.
>
> (Donchin, Influence 85)

Donchin's phrase "reaching the unreachable" shows the inherent tension in the unattainability of the Symbolist agenda. Her term "theurgy" also points toward the spiritual intent in Symbolism. In this regard, to read Bely's works with any degree of sensitivity the contemporary critic must attend to and incorporate into her reading practice the intellectual context that fed the goal of reaching such numinous heights. Accordingly, in this chapter I will not rehearse the work that has closed on the formal elements such as the auditory, painterly, or poetic qualities of Bely's Petersburg. Rather, it is my aim to add to these readings by exposing another facet of Symbolist understanding by illuminating the connection in Petersburg between Bely and the thought of Rudolph Steiner, for it is in this connection that the theurgic element of the novel is laid bare.[37] Generally, Petersburg is a novel that embodies

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[37] Two major studies that I have consulted consider Steiner's influence on Bely and his novels: Vladimir E. Alexandrov's The Major Symbolist Fiction (1985) and Frédéric C. Kozlik's L'influence de la'anthroposophie sur l'oeuvre d'Andrei Biélyi (1981). Leonid Dolgopolov discusses Petersburg specifically in his Andrei Bely i ego roman

the Steinerian recapitulation of the Platonic correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm. More specifically, Petersburg is a unique novel in that Bely sacrifices the traditional novelistic commitment to action for one that seizes on consciousness. For Bely, however, consciousness is a complex term. Both thought and consciousness for Bely are rooted in a synthetic and occult anthropology. I choose the term "anthropology" with care and deliberation, for Bely builds his ideas of human consciousness and thought around a fourfold definition of humanity that arises from Steiner's philosophical system of Anthroposophy. Before discussing the specifics of the Steinerian scheme, it is worth opening a large umbrella of thought that will serve to place all that follows beneath. Put as succinctly as possible, Steiner defines nature as thought. Bely's adaptation of Steiner's ideas evinces itself in Petersburg in a kind of trajectory that works first to substitute consciousness for action, second, to transform consciousness for the more specific term of thinking, which includes dreams, third, thinking becomes wisdom, and wisdom proves its superiority by putting to death positivism, particularly that of Comte.

This dynamic might sound something ironically too much like a plot summary; indeed, it is. By way of justifying

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Peterburg (1988). Though these three studies are valuable, they do not make Steiner or the occult an integral part of the Symbolist novel as I proceed in this chapter; rather, they examine the influences of Steiner on Bely and his works.

this remark, even though Bely appears to eschew action and, therefore, all elements of what might be called "plot" he does not divorce himself from the traditional didactic or instrumentalist goals of the novelist. In this regard, he differs little from Huysmans or from Wilde, both of whom offer up their respective versions of a Symbolist urge to break from convention and so to orient themselves against what dominated their own material historical and artistic cultural context.

Before proceeding, it is worthwhile to note that Bely's involvement with Steiner during the writing of Petersburg (1911-1913) resulted in an occult Symbolist novel, or a secular medium for conveying scriptural truths. Nikolai Berdyaev, the famous Russian Christian philosopher and personal friend of Bely, in his article of 1918 notices the theosophic and occult tendencies in Petersburg (198). Notably, in his review article of Petersburg in 1915, Ivanov-Razumnik writes that Bely's characters are nothing more than "unconscious bearers of a cosmic idea":

> Nikolay Apollonovich and Dudkin the revolutionary are made by the will of the author into unconscious disciples of the theosophic doctrine; in the very least, their emotional experiences and feelings are such, as if they had made a careful study of both the bulky "Secret Doctrine" by Blavatsky and the voluminous collection of printed

and manuscript versions of Rudolf Steiner's exoteric and esoteric books and lectures. (53)

The most intensive and first-hand contact between Bely and Steiner took place between 1912-16, the years of writing Petersburg. By the time he had met Steiner, and followed the 'secret' lectures of 1912-13, he had already completed five out of eight chapters of Petersburg. The additions and changes that Bely made in Dornach were in the section entitled "**Второе пространство сенатора**" ("The Senator's Second Space") in Chapter 2, and two sections in Chapter 5: "**Пепп Пеппович Пепп**" ("Pepp Peppovich Pepp") and "**Страшный Суд**" ("The Last Judgement").[38] Of course, Bely had been interested in Steiner's ideas since at least 1909, but the above sections were added specifically after meeting Steiner in person.

Petersburg was written "in the period when he was under the spell of Steiner's Anthroposophy—an occult science built on the assumption of exact parallelism between microcosm and macrocosm. . . . Without a knowledge of Steiner the esoteric meaning [of Petersburg] escapes one" (Mohrenschildt 1205). Without this knowledge, the following passage where Apollon Apollonovich makes his way through the Nevsky Prospect in his cube-carriage makes little sense: while he is separated by the four walls of that carriage, he

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[38] All translations from the Russian Petersburg are by David McDuff.

also takes in the crowd that flows past him: "**Созерцая текущие силуэты—котелки, перья, фуражки, фуражки, фуражки, перья—Аполлон Аполлонович уподоблял их точкам на небосводе**" ("As he contemplated the flowing silhouettethe bowlers, feathers, service caps, service caps, service caps, feathers—Apollon Apollonovich likened them to points on the celestial vault") (18-19; 21). The reader must be familiar with Steiner's idea (discussed in more detail below) that man possesses an astral body, contiguous with his physical and other bodies.

After he became a follower of Steiner, "inspired by the new anthroposophic conception of reality, he gave free reign to his imagination and moved the centre of gravity from the level of action entirely to one of consciousness" (Holthusen, Twentieth 31). The plot of Petersburg takes place almost entirely in the minds, thoughts and dreams of the main characters. If one were to trace the events of this novel according to its actions, there would barely be enough material to occupy one of its eight chapters. In addition to the effects in the cerebral lives of the protagonists, another "unseen" dimension (Steiner's fourth, or occult dimension) plays a large part in Petersburg. Lubomir Dolezel writes of the opposition of the visible and invisible world in Petersburg and notes laconically that the visible world of the "here and now" in the novel "may not mark the limit of possible experience" (qtd. in Keys, Reluctant 227).

Indeed, as Holthusen points out,"Bely's art is deeply ecstatic and is determined by mystical experiences" (Twentieth 36).

Another early Russian critic was quick to find signs of Steiner's influence on Bely. Ivanov-Razumnik points to the "role of anthroposophy in the first version of Petersburg written in 1913, but sees this role diminishing in the 1922 version" (Beyer, Reminiscences 78).[39] And a more contemporary critic writes of the many separate components of the anthroposophic system which had deeply affected Bely's consciousness and found their artistic embodiment in Petersburg: "Many scenes in Petersburg elicit an anthroposophic understanding of man and his 'spiritual structure', his connection to 'Eternity' (that is to being)" (Dolgopolov 222).

The world view that Steiner puts forth, "in all its essentials identical with that of other theosophists, is an immensely complex doctrine about spirals of cosmic evolutions . . . and about the gradual development of individual egos" (Elsworth, Critical 39). A bit bizarre to say the least; nevertheless Steiner's theories regarding the

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[39] Today, there are three editions of Petersburg.: the "Sirin" (1913-14), the Berlin (1922) and one printed by "Nikitinskie subbotniki" (1928), which has been reprinted in 1934, 1978, and 1980. The difference between the Berlin and latter editions is insignificant; so, really, there are only two versions, the "Sirin" one and the Berlin one. The "Sirin" version contains the full original text which became the foundation for the latter (shortened) editions.

cosmic and human soul(s) and outer and inner lives have a direct bearing on Petersburg. Evidence of Steiner's ideas about these can most often be found in Petersburg in the dream sequences, hallucinations, and conditions of extreme `angst'. Before proceeding to these instances in the text, I put forward Steiner's teachings about the 'four bodily organisms' and eternity:

> The bodily organism given to us by physical nature, the Physical Body, shows itself to be permeated by a second organism, composed of forces. These forces, the presence of which make life possible, are called the etheric forces. As the word "body" signifies something form-giving, cohering, the second, supersensible, life-maintaining organism may also be termed a body, the life body or formative-force body or Etheric Body.
>
> The carrier of the feeling consciousness is a third bodily organism, the soul body or Astral Body. Such was the name given to it in more ancient times, when the special forces comprising it were experienced as coming from the cosmos. Finally, the Ego, the I, appears as the core of the human being, clearly describable by supersensible vision. This, the real being within man, carries the spirit, the comprehending

> individuality, which is forever striving towards enhanced consciousness.
>
> (Fränkl-Lundborg 14)

Again, to quote from Berdyaev's early article on Petersburg, the Russian reviewer correctly observes the connection between Anthroposophy and Bely:

> Bely is an artist of the astral order into which our world, losing its fixity and solidity, imperceptibly passes. . . . Petersburg is an astral novel in which everything moves beyond the physical boundaries of the corporeal world and the spiritual limits of human life, in which everything tumbles into the abyss. (201)

In accordance with the anthroposophic teaching, Bely sees the outside world only as a projection of the individual consciousness; or, in other words, the events of the material world are drawn into the immanence of consciousness. This can be demonstrated in the attitude of the author to the action of the novel and its characters: everything is but a 'cerebral game' of the author. The characters, in turn, are allowed by the author to play their own cerebral games, and have their own figures and objects materialize out of them. For example, Apollon Apollonovich materializes Dudkin while riding in his lacquered cube-like carriage on his way to the office:"**Мы уже видели: один такой гений (незнакомец с черными усиками), возникая, как образ, з а-**

б ы т и й с т в о в а л" ("We have already seen: one such spirit (the stranger with the small black mustache), coming into being as an image, had then simply *begun to exist"*); then his office door: **"от департментской лестницы до дверей кабинета Аполлон Апллонович волею перемещал центр сознания"** ("Apollon Apollonovich transferred the centre of his consciousness by willpower from the departmental staircase to the doors of his office"); and writing desk: **"Кучка бумаг выскочила на поверхность: . . . а мозговая игра, ограничивая поле сенаторского зрения, продолжала там воздвигать свои туманные плоскости"** ("The little heap of papers [on his desk] leapt to the surface: . . . while the cerebral game, restricting the senator's field of vision, continued to erect there its misty planes"); and finally the senator's house itself escapes from his brain as he enters it (30, 27, 28, 32; 35, 32, 33, 36). Apollon Apollonovich's escaping thoughts come full circle; after Dudkin arises like a thought in Apollon Apollonovich's head and gains a life of its own, in turn, Aleksandr Ivanovich comes to Ableukhov's brain/house.

The cerebral games of the characters are a curious twist on the microcosm/macrocosm correspondence. The rooms inside the Ableukhov house are illusions that take form; the staircase **"на ней же—ступени: мягкие, как мозговые извилины"** ("has steps—as soft as the convolutions of the brain") (30; 36). Unless Apollon Apollonovich imagines one, there is no drawing-room: **"оказались . . . мозговые пространства: извилины,**

серое и белое вещество, шишковидная железа" ("there turned out to be . . . cerebral spaces, convolutions, grey and white matter, the pineal gland"), and the walls are "голые стены были только свинцовым и болевым ощущением: затылочной, лобной, височных и темянных костей, принадлежащих почтенному черепу" ("only a leaden and painful sensation: of the occipital, frontal, temporal and sincipital bones belonging to the respected skull" (31; 37). The numerous passages in Petersburg regarding the dubious nature of the city itself attest to the same notion of reality/unreality; unless one sees the city as a circle on a map or imagines it, "это только кажется, что он существует" ("it only seems to exit") (2; 2). Dostoevsky had called Petersburg the "most intentional city in the world"; the city is "the product of one man's will. . . . [it] arose in Peter's brain" (Maguire in Spirit 107). The streets of Petersburg, the Nevsky Prospect, all the buildings and people only exist if someone brings them forth out of his brain, as Apollon Apollonovich does. Or, as Dudkin's spiritual visitor Shishnarfne explains, Petersburg exists in the occult fourth dimension:

> Петербург, имеет не три измерения— четыре; четвертое— подчинено неизвестности и на картах не отмечено вовсе, разве что точкою, ибо точка есть место касания плоскости этого бытия к шаровой поверхности громадного астрального космоса. (339)

> Petersburg possesses not three dimensions, but four; the fourth is subject to obscurity and is not marked on maps at all, except as a dot, for a dot is the place where the plane of this existence touches against the spherical surface of the immense astral cosmos. (407)

Self-thinking thoughts are part of Steiner's conception of the spiritual dimension of the world: "thoughts must be imagined as living, independent entitites" (An Outline 78). As Apollon Apollonovich thinks Dudkin into being, so do the senator's idle thoughts appear **"в виде сына сенатора, тоже носящего в голове свои праздные мысли"** ("in the form of the senator's son, who also carries his own idle thoughts in his head") (55; 65). Nikolai Apollonovich experiences the following phenomenon: **"А какие-то все же тут были рои себя мысливших мыслей; мыслил мысли не он, но . . . себя мысли мыслили"** "(But there were still these swarms of thoughts that thought themselves; it was not he who thought the thoughts, but . . . the thoughts that thought themselves") (358; 428). Here is a major parallel between Bely's theory of Symbolism and Steiner's "conception of 'self-thinking thoughts' incarnated as matter (Alexandrov 90). Whereas Steiner says that "die *Ideenwelt* ist der Urquell und das Prinzip alles Seins," Bely echoes the same idea in his essay "The Emblematics of Meaning" (published in 1909 and actually predating Steiner's work) and "Why I became a Symbolist"-the

idea that "reality is created by us in the activities of creative cognition" (Steiner, Credo 3; Bely qtd. in Alexandrov 112). Moreover, "Steiner's conception of the non-subjective character of thought provides the solution to the problem of the status of the human creative act, that beset Bely's theory of Symbolism." Bely speaks of the realization that "it is not I who think the thoughts; they think me . . ." and that "thought and nature are the same" (Na Perevale, 135, 14; qtd. in Elsworth, Critical, 43). Cerebral play and self-thinking thoughts are "identical, and . . . indicate a transcendent force acting through the human mind" (Alexandrov 116). According to Steiner, thoughts are objective in nature—just as one can get to know the "unseen" spiritual world objectively. Thoughts have a life of their own.

All three main characters of the novel, Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov, Nikolai Apollonovich Ableukhov, and Aleksandr Ivanovich Dudkin experience a kind of thinking that takes over their whole beings; sometimes this domination takes place in dreams as well. All three characters spend much time alone, within their private spaces, literally, where they are given to self-thinking thoughts and astral flights. Apollon Apollonovich, the Comtean, lives in his isolated "lacquered house," with his belongings organized into numbered shelves; for example, his gloves are kept on the "Shelf B-North-West" (8, 7). The

events of life passed by outside the yellow house which he shares with his son Nikolai Apollonovich, yet inside "**крутились в сознании обитателей мозговые какие-то игры, как густые пары в герметически закупоренных котлах**" ("some kind of cerebral games whirled in the consciousness of the inhabitants like dense vapours in hermetically sealed boilers") (7; 8). Nikolai Apollonovich barely leaves his lavishly decorated quarters; at the beginning of the novel, he, in the word's of his manservant, "'**затворяться изволят и книжки читают**'" ("'is pleased to shut himself up and read books'") until the late hours, sleeping in till noon every day (10; 11). At the beginning of the novel, both father and son, and Aleksandr Ivanovich Dudkin as well, are extremely inept at making conversation with others because they basically live alone inside their heads.

Apollon Apollonovich's cerebral play is "**отличалась странными, весьма странными, чрезвычайно странными свойствами: черепная коробка его становилася чревом мысленных образов, воплощавшихся тотчас в этот призрачный мир**" ("distinguished by strange, highly strange, exceedingly strange qualities: his cranium became the womb of mental images that were instantly incarnated in this ghostly world") (29-30; 35). Moreover, "**каждая праздная мысль развивалась упорно в прственно-временный образ, продолжая свои—теперь уже бесконтрольные—действия вне сенаторской головы**" ("each idle thought stubbornly developed into a spatio-temporal image, continuing its—by now

unchecked—activities outside the senatorial head") (30; 35). Behind the cerebral play of the characters, and of the author, are forces of the occult: "**Мозговая игра—только маска; под этою маскою совершается вторжение в мозг неизвестных нам сил**" ("Cerebral play is only a mask; behind this mask the invasion of the brain by forces unknown to us is accomplished") (55; 65). If Apollon Apollonovich is "**некий центр**" ("a kind of centre") for all the persons and objects that materialize out of his Zeus-like brain, or "**являлся силовой излучающей точкой**" ("a point of radiating energy"), then, the narrator explicates, he is "**был силой в ньютоновском смысле; а сила в ньютоновском смысле, как верно неведомо вам, есть оккультная сила**" ("a force in the Newtonian sense; and a force in the Newtonian sense is, as you probably do not know, an occult force") (48;56, 57).

The nature of thoughts in Petersburg is such that, in the case of Apollon Apollonovich, his cerebral play creates a mysterious stranger, "**незнакомец тот—есть, действительно есть: не исчезнет он с петербургских проспектов, пока существует сенатор с подобными мыслями, потому что и мысль—существует**" ("that stranger exists, really does exist: he will not disappear from the Petersburg prospects while a senator with such thoughts exists, because thought, too, exists") (55; 65). Dudkin, just like Apollon Apollonovich, has idle thoughts as well, "**и те праздные мысли обладали все теми же свойствами. Убегали и упрочнялись**" ("and those idle thoughts

possessed the same qualities. They escaped and acquired substance") (30; 35). Thought has an independent existence in the novel. On a literary level, the author's brain produces these characters for the reader, but the characters, and objects, come alive in the reader's mind, and therefore exist. On an occult level,

> Steiner argues that thinking is not subjective. There must be thought before there can be concepts. 'Subject' and 'object,' being concepts, are the product of thought, and it is therefore false to say that the individual subject thinks. Since thinking is beyond subject and object, is neither subjective nor objective, the application by the thinking subject of a concept to the object is a process performed not by the subject, but by thinking itself. Steiner thus reaches a position where thought acquires an independent existence and man, in the act of thinking, participates in a universal process. (Elsworth, Critical 41)

The main characters of the novel—the senator Apollon Apollonovich (senator and Zeus or Turanian), his son Nikolai Apollonovich ("godlike ice" and "little frog") and Dudkin (Alexandr Ivanovich and the "Elusive One")—experience the separation of consciousness from the rest of them. For example, Apollon Apollonovich undergoes the following sensations, while in "the office of the lofty Institution":

Здесь сознание отделялось от доблестной личности, проливаясь вокруг между стен, проясняясь невероятно, концентрируясь со столь большой силой в единственной точке (меж глазами и лбом), что казалось невидимый, беленький огонек, вспыхнувши меж глазами и лбом разбрасывал вокруг снопы змеевидных молний; мысли-молнии разлетались, как змеи от лысой его головы; и если бы ясновидящий стал в ту минуту пред лицом почтенного мужа, без сомнения пред собой он увидел бы голову Горгоны медузы. (48)

Here consciousness detached itself from valiant personality, spilling around between the walls, growing incredibly clear, concentrating with such great force in a single point (between the eyes and the forehead) that it seemed an invisible, white light, flaring up between the eyes and the forehead, scattered around sheaves of serpentine lightnings; the lightning thoughts flew asunder like serpents from his bald head; and if a clairvoyant had stood at that moment before the face of the venerable statesman, he would without doubt have seen the head of the Gorgon Medusa. Here consciousness detached itself from valiant personality; while personality, with an abyss of all possible kinds of agitations (that incidental

> consequence of the soul's existence), presented itself to the senator's soul as a cranium, an empty, at the present moment voided, container. (57)

In the section entitled "**Второе пространство сенатора**" ("The Senator's Second Space"), Apollon Apollonovich "**видел всегда д в а пространства: одно—материальное (стенки комнат и стенки кареты), другое же не то, чтоб духовное (материальное также)**" ("always saw *two* spaces: one that was material (the walls of rooms and the walls of carriages), and another which was not exactly spiritual (it too was material)" (150; 179). Dolgopolov writes that "the 'astral world' (the second space) gains, under the pen of Bely, an almost material tangibility and an outstanding artistic expressiveness. The abstract mystical category, meant to designate moments of 'contact' between man and 'other worlds', suddenly extends to designate the majesty and grandeur of the real world, surrounding the senator" (223).

Similarly, in passages dedicated to Nikolai Apollonovich, for example, where he falls asleep over the bomb which is about to explode (193 ff), in his dream he experiences the separation of his body and soul. Again, this corresponds to anthroposophical teaching:

> Spiritual Science perceives how in sleep the astral body and the ego are loosened from their binding which they have in their waking connection

> with the etheric and physical bodies, and how they return again to this connection on awakening. During sleep, the ego and astral body enter into the region of their origin, into the supersensible world. (Fränkl-Lundborg 14)

Man's "etheric body" is in a higher realm and in touch with those who have died before and whence man shall go to join them (Steiner, Life 154).

In "**Страшный суд**" ("The Last Judgement") dream sequence, when Nikolai meets the Turanian forefather, Nikolai Appolonovich experiences the "supersensible" realm, or, rather, his "etheric body" does, which it does every night anyway when he sleeps and dreams. According to Steiner, "only at moments of danger or at crucial turning points" in one's life does one dream of the dead (Bartz 28). Only advanced students in spiritual science have made enough progress to process messages from the dead (Steiner, Life 135). In this section of Chapter 5 (318 ff), Nikolai Apollonovich's "everyday task" is "**к далёкому астральному путешествию, или сну (что, заметим мы—то же)**" ("a remote astral journey, or sleep (which, we shall observe, is the same thing)"), and beyond its door he finds an "**нетекущую глубину: космическую безмерность**" ("un-everyday depth: cosmic immensity") (265; 318). During this particular astral journey Nikolai Apollonovich encounters his ancestor, his

great-great-grandfather Ab-Lai. The old Turanian[40] instructs the dreamer **"всем правилам мудрости"** ("in all the precepts of wisdom"), while Nikolai Apollonovich's pile of exercise books **"распалась кучечкой пепла"** ("[disintegrates] into a small pile of ash") (268; 321). All of Ableukhov's previous knowledge is rendered useless: **"вместо Канта быть должен Проспект"** ("instead of Kant, it ought to be: the Prospect") (268; 321). The *Prospect* is obviously a play on words: it is the Nevsky Prospect in the unreal city of Petersburg as well as prospect in the sense of "sight" and "future."

The narrator of Petersburg tells the reader of **"разделенность и души Николая Аполлоновича"** ("the division that also existed in Nikolai Apollonovich's soul"); on the one hand he is **"богоподобный лед"** ("godlike ice"), and on the other, **"просто лягушечья слякоть"** ("simply froglike slush") (66; 79). "The godlike one" and "the little frog" are the two that make up Nikolai Apollonovich. In Egyptian mythology, the goddess Heqt has a frog-like head. She represents resurrection. This polarity is tremendously rich: there is a connection to Petersburg being built on a swamp. In other words, Nikolai Apollonovich is the elusive city's ideal citizen—an amphibian—who will resurrect himself through spiritual initiation and rebirth.

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[40] Steiner talks about root races that have dominated, one after another in world history. During the predominance of the Turanians and Mongols, logic was invented. See McDuff, 594, n 13 in Petersburg.

In Petersburg Russia itself is divided in two: "**на-двое разделились и самые судьбы отечества; на-двое разделилась, страдая и плача, до последнего часа—Россия**" ("divided in two were the very destinies of the fatherland; divided in two, suffering and weeping, until the last hour, is Russia") (106; 126). In keeping with the microcosm/macrocosm cosmology, common to both Steiner and Bely, the Russian author's adaptation of the Anthroposophist's thought does not confine itself to the realm of characters. Indeed, Bely's accommodation of Steiner's thought extends to the concept of state, city, and nation, something which is one of Petersburg's most fascinating aspects.

Anthroposophy for Bely meant the other half of his creative component. He, and other Symbolists like Ivanov and Blok, saw theology and literature as sister arts. This explains the Symbolists' interest in various religious experiences, their belief in supernatural beings, the ability to have mystical experiences, the concept of messianism, and focussing on the return of Christ. For Bely, such religious interest culminated in the spiritual science of Steiner:

> Belyj fühlte sich von der Anthroposophie als einer Erkenntnismethode angezogen, die sich berufen glaubte, das Reich des Geistigen zu erklären und die zwischen Wissenschaft und Mystizismus bestehenden Gegensätze zu versöhnen. (Burkhart 55)

At the centre of Steiner's teachings stands the figure of Christ. In this way Anthroposophy differs from other occult religions, the mysticism of Madame Blavatsky, for example, whose theosophy has also gained popularity around the turn of the century. Among the Russian Symbolists, as one who had combined art and religion and messianism, "Bely in particular saw himself as a Christ figure, as the 'white horseman' who . . . had come to reign victorious over the new era" (Bethea 109).

While in the Norwegian capital of Christiania (now Oslo) in September and October of 1913, Bely experiences a mystical and religious conversion. He and Asia, as usual, had come to participate in a series of lectures, this time on "The Fifth Gospel," given by Rudolf Steiner, "who at this time became a mentor for Bely in his unending search for *an inner basis*" (Helle 5). This experience of rebirth for Bely occurred as at the age of thirty-three, a 'holy age', and in a city with Christ's name in it; "the assonance is interpreted as a *correspondence* of great spiritual value. . . . It is of particular importance that the days here are seen as the introduction to a new, *anthroposophical* phase in his life" (Helle 5-6).

Bely experiences visions of Christ, which continue even after his return to Russia in 1916. In his Reminiscences of Rudolf Steiner Bely writes that everything that was perceived during that time could be summed up in the theme:

"Rudolf Steiner and Christ" (qtd. in Helle 7). Bely believes that for the first time he understands himself and grasps the countenance of Christ, via this so-called christological Steinerism. It is because of these lectures given in Christiania and his understanding of "The Fifth Gospel" that Bely "recognizes his closeness to Steiner, to such a degree that he sees himself as the adopted son of Steiner" (Beyer, "Reminiscences 83). In his life and work from that time on Bely sought "the figure of Christ as presented to the world by Rudolf Steiner"(Beyer, "Reminiscences" 85).

Steiner, as presented in "The Fifth Gospel," was certain that Christ's revelation is an ongoing process which continues until the last day. Everyone, whose 'spiritual eyes' have been opened, can experience these revelations. Steiner himself "does not hesitate to give detailed and concrete descriptions of events in the life of Jesus which the gospels do not mention" (Lissau 73). Bely, after his experience upon hearing the lectures on "The Fifth Gospel" in Christiania, writes: "For the *first time* I understood myself; and for the *first time* I understood Jesus.... Jesus is a Friend, whom I had forgotten, but who had not forgotten me" (Bely qtd, in Beyer, "Reminiscences 82).

Christ appears in Petersburg in the Second Chapter, under the subheading "**Высыпал, высыпал**" ("He Appeared, He Appeared") (102; 121 ff). Reminiscent of Christ's *via dolorosa*, Bely's Christ emerges in Petersburg as someone

"**бледен и хрупок; . . шагал с преогромною суковатою палкою**" ("pale and fragile, . . walking with an enormous gnarled stick") (102; 121). The reader recognizes the Christ figure by the Johannine "I AM": he "was what he was" and shows compassion to the dwellers of Petersburg (102, 103; 121, 123). While the narrator announces,"**Высыпал, высыпал!**" ("He appeared, he appeared!"), the enemy of the Russian people have come as well: "**Повысыпали на улицу и косматые манджурские шапки**" ("In the street the shaggy Manchurian hats also appeared") (104; 123). The Oriental force has been Russia's enemy since the Middle Ages at least, and during the apocalyptic mood times in the novel, the Manchurians also represent the metaphysical enemy.

Sofya Petrovna encounters the "**печальный и длинный**" ("sad and tall") one in a "**белое домино**" ("white domino") with a strange light "**свет заструился так грустно от чела его**" ("stream[ing] so sadly from his forehead") as she is leaving the masked ball (190; 227-28). She understands all at once who is before her when he speaks: "**Вы все отрекаетесь от меня: я за всеми вами хожу. Отрекаетесь, а потом призываете**" ("You all deny me: I look after you all. You deny me, and then you call on me"); she is ready to fall at his feet when he disappears (192; 230). Here Bely borrows his image of Christ from Steiner's 1911 lecture about the appearance of Christ in an Etheric Body as opposed to a Physical one. Steiner contended that "the Etheric Christ will come to comfort men,

and will show his supersensible origins by vanishing immediately after appearing" (Alexandrov 143).

In the same chapter, Nikolai Apollonovich realizes that there is more to what meets the eye everywhere around him; he has just left the Tsukatovs' ball as well, and noticing first the "tall and sad" one, observes that he has no feet. Not only does he realize that his feet are completely absent but also **"в душе его что-то жалобно промычало: промычало так жалобно, как мычит кроткий вол под ножом быкобойца"** ("something in his soul bellowed piteously; bellowed as piteously as a meek ox bellows under the butcher's knife") (203; 243). At this moment Nikolai Apollonovich comprehends that

> **Домик неспроста, как неспроста и все: все сместилось в нем, сорвалось; сам с себя он сорвался; и откуда-то (неизвестно откуда), где он не был еще никогда, он глядит!** (204)

> there [is] more to the little house than [meets] the eye, as there was more to everything else, too: everything within him had been dislocated, torn; and from somewhere (he knew not from where) he had never yet been, he was watching! (243).

This episode sounds like the moment of initiation which Steiner speaks about, the moment when a man undergoes the most profound change within his being and thinking. He

grasps that this world is transitory and that "**его подлинный дух-созерцатель**" ("his true contemplative spirit") is transcendent, immortal and that he, in this world, is "**бренная оболочка**" ("a transitory shell") (204; 244).

Suddenly, not unlike Des Esseintes of A Rebours, Nikolai Apollonovich finds himself thinking about religion. Until this moment he had read the great religious thinkers, without believing in a divine essence, and collected religious objects (264; 316-17). In almost a nagging way, his thoughts are turning to religion. Even beginning with "**Страшный суд**" ("The Last Judgement") dream at the end of Chapter 5, Apollon Apollonovich feels like he is losing his body, and expanding (323, 259). "**Между двух подъездных дверей**" ("Between the two doors of his entrance porch"), symbolic for his state between two worlds,

> **на него нападало (как и на Аполлона Аполлоновича) одно странное, очень странное, чрезвычайно странное состояние: будто все, что было за дверью, было не тем а иным; . . нет ничего, и что если дверь распахнуть, то дверь распахнется в пустую космическую безмерность, куда остается . . . разве что кинуться вниз головой, чтоб лететь, лететь и лететь—и куда пролетевши, узнаешь, что та безмерность есть небо и звезды—те же небо и звезды, что видим мы над собой, и видя—не видим. . . . Странное, очень странное полусонное состояние.** (264-65)

> he (like Apollon Apollonovich) was assailed by a certain strange, very strange, exceedingly strange condition: as though everything that lay beyond the door there was not what it was, but something else: . . nothing, and that if one were to fling the door wide open, then the door would open on an empty, cosmic immensity, into which all that was left was for one to . . . throw oneself headfirst, in order to fly, fly and fly—and having flown somewhere, perceive that the immensity was the sky and the stars—the same sky and stars that we see above us, and in seeing do not see. . . .
> A strange, very strange condition of semi-sleep.
>
> (317)

After this experience, Nikolai Apollonovich no longer speaks in Kantian terms. Dudkin is the one to recognize this change in Ableukhov: "**вы теперь говорите совсем другим языком**" ("now you are speaking quite a different language") (293; 352). Nikolai Apollonovich replies that his eyes have been opened: "**какая-то слетела повязка со всех ощущений . . . Не по Канту**" ("it's as though a bandage has fallen-from all my sensations . . . . Kant is out of it completely!") (293; 352). Then and there Nikolai Apollonovich displays "**обнаруживал теперь своим видом, ну прямо-таки, вдохновение какое-то**" ("in his appearance something that was quite simply inspiration") and "**радость**" ("joy"); in his own words

the character affirms that "'будто какое-то откровение, что я— рос; рос я, знаете ли, и неизмеримость, преодолевая пространства; уверяю вас, что то было реально'" ("'it was as though I had a revelation that I was growing; I was growing, if you know what I mean, into immeasurability traversing space; I assure you that this was real'") (296; 355). Dudkin explains to Nikolai Apollonovich that the states of being he describes are the subject of study "в оккультических изысканиях" ("in occult research") (298; 357). Dudkin becomes the ex-Kantian's mentor in the occult in Chapter 6. Steiner had set out to challenge Kant's doctrine "of the essential limitation of human knowledge" (Hemleben 61).

From the beginning of his career as occult leader, Steiner had "attempted to develop a system of knowledge or a discipline leading to the systematic or scientific attainment of the highest level of spiritual reality" (Williams-Hogan) 249).[41] At the same time, "it was during the nineteenth century, certainly, and most noticeably within the widening European "high cultural" circles that the traditional, Biblically-oriented ways of envisaging world history (and also cosmic beginnings) received their most serious threat of replacement" (Trompf 270). Anthroposophy offered just such a replacement. In the words of its founder,

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[41] See Lavrov's introduction to Andrei Bely's Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii for an integration of Anthroposophy and autobiography in Bely's writings.

> Anthroposophy is . . . the scientific investigation of the spiritual world, a method which recognizes the one-sidedness of natural science as well as of usual mysticism; a method that activates the soul powers necessary for spiritual research (which remain dormant in ordinary consciousness and also for contemporary science) before attempting to penetrate the supersensible world.
>
> (Fränkl-Lundborg 12)

Steiner's main postulate is that in order to change the world, one must begin with the spiritual transformation of man. He utilizes selected mythological motifs (mostly of Eastern origin—Buddhism, Gnosticism, Hellenism and others), adorned with Christian mythology. Steiner's mythology includes the belief in a divinely beautiful man (reminiscent of Vladimir Solovyov's state of 'godmanhood'), who can come into being in every man, here and now. This divine essence is stored in every individual, one must only learn how to bring it out, and how to grow spiritually to one's fullest potential.

In Petersburg, the role of facilitator of this divine essence belongs to Dudkin. He brings Nikolai Apollonovich out of his dead-end Kantean and Physical Body realms and instructs him in the attainment of growing into a 'beautiful man'. At first Dudkin seems to be an unlikely John-the-

Baptist figure; however, where else would the wild man of the desert live but on the shadowy islands of Petersburg, in an attic—Dudkin lives in an attic and "**что за убогое обиталище!**" ("what a miserable abode it was!") (273; 327). Despite its lack of luxury (four cracked boards for a bed, which are covered in red spots from bedbugs, one dirty sheet and a small cover that used to be a knitted blanket), Dudkin's room commands some attention since this is the place where he experiences his flights into the subconscious world; this is where "**переходное состояние между бдением и сном его бросало куда-то: точно с пятого этажа выскакивал он чрез окошко**" ("the transitional state between waking and sleep was throwing him somewhere: as though he were jumping out of the window from the fifth floor"); this is where he receives the mysterious visitor Shishnarfne, first as a vision of a face in the "**непиятных и наглых [обой]**" ("unpleasant and brazen" wallpaper, and later as a benevolent spiritual visitor in the guise of a person (272, 274; 326, 328).

Dudkin, "the young terrorist-mystic," received his occult training in Helsingfors, where he first met Shishnarfne. Scrambled, in occult fashion, the letters in Shishnarfne spell Helsingfors, with one "s" and one "a" remaining, which, of course, stand for Steiner and Anthroposophy. Because Shishnarfne is an occult figure, he is also called by the same name, only spelled backwards. *Enfranshish* is how he first appears to Dudkin and

Shishnarfne he remains unto the end of Petersburg, settling in Dudkin's throat (93, 341; 110, 409). In Steinerian thought, a Shishnarfne would signify so-called "psycho-spiritual organs" which grow inside various parts of a human body, by means of which they gain "spiritual sight" in order to "commune with the higher world" (Alexandrov 119). When he thus communes, Dudkin's soul experiences astral flights; in the character's own words: "'**Да, душа моя, точно мировое пространство; и оттуда, из мирового постранства, я на все и смотрю**'" ("'Yes, my soul, it's like outer space; and from there, from outer space, I look at everything'" (95; 113).

As with Anthroposophy, there is a strange mixture of traditional Christianity and the occult in the character of Dudkin and, later, Nikolai Apollonovich as well. Both characters possess sacred objects, à la Des Esseintes, in their private chambers. In Aleksandr Ivanovich's lodgings "**над постелью висел образок, изображавший тысячаночную молитву Серафима Саровскоо**" ("above the bed hung a small icon depicting Serafim Sarov's thousand nights of prayer") (273; 328). Dudkin himself wears "**под сорочкою носил серебряный крестик**" ("a small silver cross under his shirt") (274; 328). His books include the Revelation of St John and occult writings; when he visits Nikolai Apollonovich, he confesses to reading the history of gnosticism, Gregory of Nyssa (a Neoplatonist ascetic), Ephraem Syrus (a fourth-century Church Father) and the Apocalypse (88; 104). At the same

time, during Dudkin's bouts of insomnia, "[**н е к а я о с о б а**]" ("*a certain person*") or Shishnarfne appears to him (98; 116). "The spectral face" that materializes on the yellow wallpaper turns Dudkin into "**в Дукинскую тень**" ("the shadow of Dudkin") and spreads him on the wall of his garret, forcing the Elusive One to stand in the crucified-Christ position for hours (98; 116).

In the beginning of Petersburg, Nikolai Apollonovich tried to think like a Kantian, but, when emotions flared, he began to think more like Steiner (Ivanov-Razumnik, "Andrey" 53). Behind the orderly and methodical Apollon Apollonovich (Comte) and intellectual, detached Nikolay Apollonovich (Kant) "cosmic" and "spiritual" realities are revealed, albeit in times of stress and unconscious moments (dreaming). In Chapter 1, Nikolai Apollonovich's shelves are "**туго набиты книгами**" ("tightly packed with books"), with several rows of Kant's writings, "**и прекрасен был бюст . . . разумеется, Канта же**" ("and there was a handsome bust of . . . Kant, of course") (40; 47). However, two and half years earlier, since his mother left, he became inspired by an Oriental turn in his furnishings (his Oriental drawing-room), revealing a shift in consciousness as well. The split in his personality is further revealed by the comments of onlookers. While his godlike countenance looks like Apollo Belvedere, the sun god, son of Zeus, the paragon of classical beauty, at the same time, he gains some Christ-

like qualities; people around him speak of the pallour of his face and his marble profile that looks divine (45; 53).

By the fourth chapter of Petersburg the dust begins to settle on Kant, **"в душе ж ебыл ток неизведанный чувства"** ("while in his soul there was a novel current of emotion") (156; 187). Nikolai Apollonovich begins to grow spiritually; he is on his path of embracing the mystical and occult realities. Notably, in the same chapter, Nikolai Apollonovich tries to get away from someone named Varvara Yevgrafovna Solovyova, who is no doubt the eternal feminine incarnation of Solovyov's Sophia.[42] Nikolai is ready for different spiritual experiences.

During his encounter with the "sad and tall one" in Chapter 7, Nikolai Apollonovich experiences **"будто кто-то печальный . . . вокруг души его очертил благой проницающий круг, и вступил в его душу; стал душу пронизывать светлый свет его глаз"** ("as though someone . . . had outlined around his soul a solid, penetrating circle and had entered his soul; the bright light in his eyes began to transpierce his soul") (362; 433). Nikolai Apollonovich grows more Christ-like close to the end of the novel; he even becomes a martyr for

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[42] For Vladimir Solovyov Sophia represents the Divine Wisdom of God, with a tie to Goethe's Eternal Feminine. She can be said to symbolize the fourth feminine part of the Holy Trinity. Solovyov claims to have encountered three visions of Sophia himself. For further reading on the Divine Sophia and Soloviev see Donald M. Fiene's articles and Samuel D. Cioran's studies of Solovyov, named in my Works Cited.

Christ:

Вот—страдальчески усмехнувшийся рот, вот—глаза василькового цвета, вот—светом стоящие волосы: облеченный в ярость огней с искрою пригвожденными в воздухе широко раздвинутыми руками, с опрокинутыми в воздухе ладонями—ладонями, которые проткнуты,—

—крестовидно раскинутый
НиколайАполлонович там страдает из
светлости светов и указует очами на красные
ладонные язвы; а из разъятого неба льет ему
росы прохладный ширококрылый архангел.
(430)

Here was the martyred, grinning mouth, here were the eyes of cornflower blue, here was the hair bathed in light: enwrapped in the fury of the fire, with arms spread wide, nailed by sparks in the air, with palms upturned in the air—palms, that were pierced through,—

Nikolai Apollonovich, spread out in the
shape of a cross, was suffering there
out of the radiance of the light and
indicating with his eyes the red sores
on his palms; while from the sundered
heavens the cool, broad-winged archangel
poured dew for him. (513-14)

Nikolai Apollonovich is on his last stage of the journey—on his way to Wisdom.

In the end, the Epilogue, Nikolai Apollonovich rents a cottage in a village near Tunis; he has spent the last two years studying the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Nikolai Apollonovich "**провалился в Египте**" ("has vanished in Egypt") and "**Кант? Кант забыт**" ("Kant? Kant is forgotten") (483; 576, 577). In Rudolf Steiner's system of belief Egyptian mythology occupied a place of high importance. The Egyptian mystery religions, Hermes Trismegistus' "hidden mysteries," which "united the occult systems of East and West," and the Book of Dead were considered to be fundamental esotericism by Bely's mentor (Carlson, "The Ableukhov" 166). Next, Ableukhov's pilgrimage takes him to Nazareth—the birthplace of Christ. As Carlson points out, by going to the place of Christ's home on earth (where Jesus lived the first thirty years of his life until he was rejected by its townspeople) and Egypt, the home of the sage Hermes, Nikolai Apollonovich, "concerned with the mystery wisdom, is one step closer to achieving the higher knowledge for which he had long been searching ("The Ableukhov" 166). Even Apollon Apollonovich turns away from Comte when he declares near the end of the novel that humanity is incapable of progress, which is a final blow to the positivists who combined "teaching about the overall progress of consciousness—away from theology and towards science—with the 'worship of

humanity'" (Trompf 273). At the very end, Nikolai Apollonovich dedicates his life to the study of eighteenth-century Ukrainian Neo-platonist and mystic Grigory Skovoroda (1722-94).

By way of concluding this chapter on Anthroposophic Scripture, I reiterate Bely's mission to link art with religion, or occult philosophy of Steiner, as the highest good and calling of an artist. Bely's art, as does Symbolist art in general, presumes "a relationship between the artistic text and Holy Writ" (Pyman, "Symbolism" 379). Bely writes in his "Simvolizm kak miroponimanie": "Art ceases to be a self-sufficient form. But it cannot on the other hand be made to serve utilitarian ends. Instead, it is becoming a pathway to a more essential type of cognition, namely religious cognition" (Hutchings 142). Art becomes the medium through which religious truth is conveyed and continued, a sort of third gospel, after the Old and New Testaments. The artist is responsible for the continued creation of scripture through secular yet inspired means. The religious wing of the Russian Symbolists which included Bely insisted that art be "not utilitarian but 'prophetic'" and that the Symbolists' prophetic words "might represent 'a higher form of didactic art'" (West, James 123). Bely wrote in "The Meaning of Art" that art "'has no meaning other than a religious meaning', but that it is not subject to religious dogma, except when it is moribund" (West, James 135). In his

introduction to his collection of essays under the title Symbolism, Bely writes that "Symbolism is to me a certain religious creed" (ii).

Considering its lack of an engaging plot, the possibility of enjoyment of the novel lies in the understanding of Steiner's Theosophy and Anthroposophy. The embodiment of the occult by Symbolism "suggests that external appearances are meaningless yet necessary, to allude to a spiritual ideal" (Choucha 19). The Symbolists' general mystical perception of the world, their adoption of the neoplatonic idea of the existence of things unseen behind things seen, and the idea that the task of an artist is to interpret things unseen find its correspondence in theosophical and anthroposophical ideas. Nikolai Gumilev, in his Acmeist Manifesto of 1913, writes of the Silver Age's predilection for occultism and mysticism: "Russian Symbolism had directed its main efforts towards the unknown. It fraternized, by turns, with mysticism, theosophy, and occultism" (in Trifonov 99, 427). Steiner's philosophy, which was theosophist at first, until he founded Anthroposophy in 1913, is "in direct contradiction to the theories of nineteenth-century positivists [Auguste Comte]. . . . Traditional metaphysics such as Plato's posited abstract or occult (that is, hidden), entities which are unobservable by definition" (Anschuetz 131). Williams-Hogan speaks of Theosophy as "one of the streams flowing into the

Symbolist Movement" (247). Steiner saw art as a bridge between the spiritual and physical divisions in man. Andrei Bely, the major Russian Symbolist who embodied Steiner's occult philosophies into his own works of art, developed not only a new mode of writing but also a complete world view which grapples with the ultimate questions of existence.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND TOWARDS MODERNISM

> "The path is traced, *à rebours*."
> (Baudelaire, Les Fleurs du mal)
>
> It is precisely at the moment when positivism is at its heights that mysticism awakens and the follies of the occult begin. — But it has always been like that; tail ends of centuries are all alike. They're periods of uncertainty and confusion. When materialism rages, then magic begins to thrive. This phenomenon reappears every hundred years.
> (Huysmans, Là-Bas)
>
> "Listen! There never was an artistic period. There never was an Art-loving nation."
> (James Abbott McNeill Whistler, "The Gentle Art of Making Enemies" (1890))

In the opening portion of this study, I assumed the obligation of providing a definition for the Symbolist novel. Such a promise is a perilous thing if it is assumed that it will issue in a systematic generical definition. Genres, of course, endlessly contaminate their own definitions, so every rule of genre tends also to carry with it a counter rule that unravels the very definition presented. This logic not only owes itself to Jacques Derrida's "Law of Genre" but also to nearly every formal

consideration of genre that can be evidenced from literary critical history. Rather than assume that generical studies are fruitless, however, the grounds of the inquiry should be changed from trying to define a container by its contents to a performative approach that proceeds by naming what a genre *does*. This focus, of course, is the goal of this study—by means of its examination of Huysman's A Rebours, Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray, and Bely's Petersburg. Each of these novels can be defined as Symbolist by virtue of their response to a specific historical context(reactionary *fin-de-siècle*), by their treatment of the reader (chiefly disregard), by their transcendent view of art, by their hermeticism, and, last, by their idiosyncratic and neo-platonic commitment first to the concept of truth, and, second, to sheltering truth from the masses. With this capsule statement in place, these concluding remarks will aim to review the historical context that gave rise to the Symbolist novel and they will show the work accomplished, that is the generical purpose, of each novel examined. Finally, this conclusion will argue that part of the work performed by the Symbolist novel lies in its role as a forerunner to Modernism.

The Symbolist novel arose in the atmosphere of decay, revival, and exhaustion that expressed itself in the mythical, spiritual, pessimistic, neo-platonic, and occult activity that began to take a discernible shape in the

middle of the nineteenth century. By the time of the century's final decades this activity had gathered enough strength to ensure that it lasted into the first two decades of the twentieth century. Huysmans' sweeping remark—"tail ends of centuries are all alike"—testifies to the fact that the conditions that produced the Symbolist novel had assumed a kind of regularity. More importantly, Huysmans' explanation of what he identifies as *fin-de-siècle* sameness—[t]hey're periods of uncertainty and confusion. When materialism rages, then magic begins to thrive"—implies that as much as a group of writers and artists constituted the Symbolist movement, its proponents were constituted by their historical conditions. This writerly awareness expresses itself in the terms of the inevitable—"[t]his phenomenon reappears every hundred years"—and so shows some of the weariness associated with the historical and cultural conditions that gave rise to Symbolism. This sense of fatigue and fate is crucial in defining the Symbolist movement because it describes its writer not in the terms of the Romantic genius, not in the terms of the Imagist credo of originary strength (Pound's dictum: "make it new"), but, rather, in their own idiosyncratic reactionary terms.

As a reactionary form, the Symbolist novel is written against the grain of popular taste. According to Huysmans, just when the reading public falls in love with everything

that predictably and concretely supports their materialistic philistine lifestyle, another form of art emerges. Bernard Swift offers a set of characteristics that are highly useful in describing this new form. He finds that Symbolist writing possesses ". . . psychological subjectivism," a "combination of aspiration and pessimism," a wide variety of "temporal perception[s]," and, significantly, such writing attempts "to justify experience through literary creation, inviting the reader to participate immediately in the process of creation itself" (786). Swift's last point requires further discussion, which occurs just below, because any readerly creation of meaning along Symbolist lines demands that the reader also has access to the same kind of esoteric knowledge that the author has. Any reader lacking such knowledge was, perforce, treated with contempt by the Symbolist author.

This blend of hermeticism and disregard shows itself well in the novels considered in this study. All three books distinguish themselves by the "high value" they place on "form, holistically conceived, as against materialistic, realistic, historical, or documentary presentation" (Bradbury, "Symbolism" 837). The popular condemnation of the Symbolist novel as opaque, then, cannot stand, for the complex and diffuse world view of Huysmans, Wilde, and Bely is just that, complicated, but not impenetrable. It will be recalled that Symbolist writers devote their pages to

probing truth and protecting truth.

In Huysmans' A Rebours Des Esseintes becomes a martyr for his truth, expressed by his life and art choices. This martyrdom proceeds first through Des Esseintes' rejection of Schopenhauer's philosophy and then to the retreat at Fontenay. The spiritual quest that ensues calls for martyrdom and concealment. In his seclusion and contemplation of art by Moreau and Luykens, Des Esseintes finds a way to enact his commitment to the sacredness of art by turning his Fontenay residence into a Decadent tabernacle enshrining Baudelaire's work. In effect, Huysmans places Symbolist truth behind the veil of the holy of holies and as acolyte becomes its guardian and defender. This role, it must be emphasized, is effected without regard to any observer or any reader's opinion. Indeed the self-absorption shown by Des Esseintes enacts the Symbolist agenda of A Rebours: the world and its most sacred symbols are exploited purely for the artist's own end and representation.

Read as a Symbolist novel Wilde's seemingly simplistic fable becomes a complex structure that works constantly to erode paradigms of cause and effect as well as linear thought through its use of chiasmus. The numerous patterns of opposition and reciprocity, involving Dorian and the portrait, the soul and the senses, art and the artist, to name the chief group, ultimately suspend any moral reading of the book. Thus, in place of a conventional reading

relationship, Wilde encourages his reader not merely to apprehend a lesson from the portrait, but, rather, to see the problematic relationship of the artist and his art. In particular, Wilde exerts on his reader a subtle pressure to realize that the intrinsic value of art renders it innocent of social value at the same time that there is a social value in arguing that art be valued merely on its own terms.

Bely's Petersburg is an incomprehensible narrative without any knowledge of Steiner's philosophy. Even then, the way in which the book mobilizes spaces, fourth dimensions, dreams, visions of Christ and the apocalypse, as well as thought as reality renders it one of the most intense expressions of writing for the sake of writing, that is, with no ostensible social agenda.

These three works thus show what a Symbolist novel does. It inscribes secret knowledge, as in the occult; it seeks to initiate its reader into this realm where life itself is conceived of as art. In each of the books studied, a notable absence of humour points to the highly serious nature of the Symbolist novel. This observation suggests one of the abiding and invigorating paradoxes of the Symbolist novel. Namely, for all its seeming dissipation, the form sought a strong and earnest rapport with the reader who had "eyes" to see and "ears" to hear.

The Symbolist novel must be defined, however, by more than its earnestness. In particular the form possesses also

a remarkable prelusiveness. That is, the Symbolist novel had a strong investment in the future, more exactly in an utopian future, for its ideal reader, one with the desired mind and spirit, did not exist in the reading public. The theosophical, mystical, anthroposophical, occult contents of the Symbolist novel were lost on most contemporary readers, and the chief impact of the form was upon other Symbolist writers. Put in blunt and colloquial terms, the Symbolist novel ended up 'preaching to the converted' of its day. The idea of subjective and intuitive reading by an initiate was one that did not come to full fruition during the Symbolist era proper. But, by looking forward to the formation of a certain literary class, an aesthetic or spiritual aristocracy, the Symbolist novel changed the very culture that it reacted against. "A key aspect of the utopian dimension" of the Symbolist novel "is the desire to create a new public of readers/spectators whose art would be diametrically opposed to the accepted norms of bourgeois, materialist culture" (Reynolds 195). The Symbolists "saw their art as destined for a superior public in the future" (Reynolds 216-17).

The ideal reader, "the superior public" envisaged by the Symbolist writer was a complex construction. Bely, Wilde, and Huysmans clearly looked forward to this public, however, for all three writers elevated art to a spiritual plane. Arthur Symons acknowledges this dynamic by concluding

his Symbolist Movement in Literature with the idea that Symbolist literature may become "itself a kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual" (174). Symons elaborates on this belief:

> Well, the doctrine of Mysticism, with which all this symbolical literature has so much to do, of which it is all so much the expression, presents us, not with a guide for conduct, not with a plan for our happiness, not with an explanation of any mystery, but with a theory of life which makes us familiar with mystery, and which seems to harmonise those instincts which make for religion, passion, and art, freeing us at once of a great bondage. (174)

Symons' view of Symbolism as nothing less than the "attempt to spiritualize literature," to make art "a kind of religion," however, was not one that perceived any kind of orthodoxy of practice.

The kind of spiritualized art that Symons looked forward to depended first on the occult, and only second on a heterodox version of Christianity. This reliance meant that the utopian nature of Symbolist writing was only intensified because the occult nature of the genre placed even higher the need for an initiated reader. In this respect, one more defining characteristic of the Symbolist novel can be seen in the way in which it replaced the

traditional religion, which had become an unbendable institution, and the way in which it reacted against newly emerging materialistic, scientific world views.

Too much emphasis on Symbolism's anticipation of a wished-for reader does little to credit the movement, particularly its novels, with one of its chief achievements. Wellek, in "Discriminations," identifies the achievement in question: "If we, as we should, extend the meaning of symbolism to prose, we can see it clearly in the late Henry James, in Joyce, in the later Thomas Mann, in Proust, in the early Gide and Faulkner, in D.H. Lawrence. . . ." (120). Where Wellek only hints at the bridge between Symbolism and Modernism, Gibbons plainly sees that "orthodox twentieth-century modernism is deeply indebted to the occult symbolist aesthetic" (viii). Gibbons develops this affiliation more fully by arguing that Symbolist writing did, in fact, succeed in creating the audience it sought:

> At the same time the occult component of the symbolist aesthetic has encouraged artists to disclaim understanding of their own work and to leave the reader or spectator to make of it what he will. These distant and unaccommodating attitudes have alienated important modern writers and artists from an increasing section of the general public, thereby contributing to and accentuating the marked twentieth-century split

> between 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' art and literature. (139-40)

Put in the terms advanced in these concluding remarks, those of generical work, Gibbons credits the "symbolist aesthetic" with creating the conditions necessary for high modernism—a "'highbrow'" audience. Gibbons thus shows one of the key reasons for undertaking a study of the Symbolist novel. That is, to read it effectively, one must possess knowledge of the philosophical, religious, and occult elements that combined to produce the Symbolist novel. This knowledge, in turn, enables an understanding of the affiliation between the Symbolist and the Modernist novel. Gibbons is worth citing again on this point:

> I wish to suggest finally and in particular that early-twentieth-century modernism is indebted to the occult revival and the symbolist aesthetics of the period 1880-1920 to such an extent that it cannot be properly understood without reference to them. (127)

Proof of Gibbons' insight is seen particularly in Stuart Gilbert's pioneering study of Joyce's Ulysses.[43] Commenting on Joyce's use of occult doctrines, Gilbert says "[i]t is impossible to grasp the meaning of Ulysses, its symbolism and the significance of its leitmotifs without an

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[43] There are striking similarities between Joyce's Ulysses and Bely's Petersburg.

understanding of the esoteric theories which underlie the work" (52).

Seen in this light, one of the defining characteristics of the Symbolist novel is indeed what Uitti calls it-"the Elizabethan dumb show put on before the great play" (18). That is, it turns out that the form--Modernism--which eclipsed or submerged Symbolism remains "unreadable to us today" without knowledge of the profoundly evocative, allusive, and unsettling dialect spoken in what is a nearly unremarked literary form-the Symbolist novel (6). Uitti's observation, however, rests on the organic relationship between the dumb show and the "great play." If extended to the relation between Symbolism and Modernism, this unity suggests that it may be very hard to discern where one ends and the other begins. As Swift notes, "it is conceivable that the apparently post-Symbolist experimental novel of the twentieth century may eventually come to be regarded as the mature manifestation of Symbolism in prose-fiction" (786). This study, of course, stops short of Swift's speculation. Swift, however, by noting the affiliation between Symbolism and Modernism offers a salutary way of closing because he points to the delightful way in which "meaning is invariably dependent upon both creator and recipient" in the Symbolist novel (787).

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